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Real Estate

The High End

Navigating the Twists and Turns of SoHo With Success

By C. J. HUGHES

SoHo is not an easy place to build. Empty lots are scarce. Many buildings require their residents to be working artists. And the neighborhood sits almost entirely in a historic district.

Then how might one explain the creation of 150 Wooster Street, a ground-up condo from the developer KUB Capital?

“We went into the process with open ears,” said Daniel Schillberg, a managing director of KUB who also designed this stylish eight-story, six-unit offering.

The process, which played out over more than three years and required multiple city approvals, began with an almost obsessive focus on acquiring the building’s site, which is on a paving-stone-lined block near West Houston Street.

In the mid-2000s, Roger Bittenbender, a founder of KUB, was living in the East Village and managing a family-owned office building on nearby Spring Street. When walking to work, Mr. Bittenbender would often pass 150 Wooster, which at the time contained a low-slung former showroom for baby strollers and a parking lot.

Mr. Bittenbender excitedly spoke about the property to Shawn Katz, a friend of his from Santa Fe, N.M., where they both used to live. Indeed, when Mr. Katz would visit New York, from Santa Fe, he said, Mr. Bittenbender would drag him to see it.

“If I could ever get that site, it would be the most amazing thing,” Mr. Bittenbender would gush, according to Mr. Katz, who would later move to New York and form KUB with Mr. Bittenbender in 2013.

KUB was at first focused solely on townhouse development in Brooklyn. But one Saturday in 2014, the firm’s founders learned that 150 Wooster was for sale. They made an offer that day, and closed on the property soon after, for nearly \$51 million.



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Above, a kitchen at 150 Wooster Street; all of the kitchens have six-burner Wolf ranges made of steel. Right, the exterior of the building, which is a ground-up condo.

Years of approval-seeking followed. New York’s City Council had to agree to a zoning change, a move that also relaxed the requirement that residents had to be artists. That requirement dates to the early 1970s, when many painters and sculptors began relocating to commercial structures in the then-shabby neighborhood.

The city’s Landmarks Preservation Commission also had to sign off on the facade, which has cream-colored, thin Danish bricks and a ribbed steel cornice that resembles an egg-slicer. Having a designer like Mr. Schillberg in-house, as opposed to using one employed by an outside firm, made the approval process smoother and faster, Mr. Katz said.

An earlier condo proposal for the site from MTM Associates, an entity linked to Maclaren, the baby-stroller company that once had a showroom in the small building on the property, had run into opposition from neighbors, who sued to stop it. The City Council later rejected the rezoning that



150 Wooster Street
\$13 million and up

All apartments also have gas fireplaces, with plaster finishes that recall adobe, the popular Santa Fe building material. Brass is also prevalent, including for the sinks in powder rooms and inlays in white-oak floors.

Master closets, with about 90 square feet of space, and in some cases, frosted-glass windows, are also notable. Each apartment also comes with a laundry room, with a sink and counter for folding.

For struggling artists, the apartments, which are being marketed by CORE New Development, are likely out of reach. Their starting price is about \$13 million, or about \$3,200 a square foot. Sales begin this fall. In comparison, the average price of new condos in SoHo — an admittedly short list — was \$9.8 million on Oct. 6, according to Streeteasy.com.

KUB principals acknowledge the Manhattan-wide slowdown affecting ultraluxury properties could be a concern. But since 150 Wooster is a new product — a relative rare commodity in the neighborhood — the hope is that it will buck the trend. Other condos there, like 63 Greene Street, are conversions.

There have been other local ground-up examples in the last few years, like 52 Wooster Street and 42 Crosby Street. But they tend to be located in the southern part of the neighborhood, unlike No. 150, which is more in the heart of the district, the developers said.

“Projects are doing well that are in irreplaceable locations,” Mr. Katz said, “and this is certainly one of those locations.”

the project required.

For its part, KUB has taken steps to mollify some of those neighbors, including positioning 150 Wooster so that its walls do not block windows at 152 Wooster, according to residents of that building.

The apartments at 150 Wooster, each of which takes up at least a full floor and has four bedrooms and four and a half baths, are inspired by the roomy lofts for which SoHo is famous.

Living rooms are spacious, at about 800 square feet, and most have four windows. Also, the almost industrial-size, six-burner Wolf ranges made of steel in the kitchens are meant to recall the restaurant-grade appliances SoHo pioneers once purchased at supply stores on the nearby Bowery, Mr. Schillberg said.