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POSTING

A Shining Moment For Builders



Qubdesign



Alchemy Properties

MALLEABLE METALS

The Indigo condo in Chelsea, shown in the rendering above, features an aluminum stripe running 13 stories tall and bisecting a field of zinc. At the 245 10th Avenue condo, in rendering at left, a stainless steel wall is punctuated by a few windows.

By C. J. HUGHES

THE facade of the Indigo, a luxury condominium rising at 125 West 21st Street, near Sixth Avenue in Chelsea, will have a wide stripe of purplish aluminum, running 13 stories from the roof deck to the sidewalk and bisecting a field of zinc.

Designed by FxFowle Architects, the building has 52 apartments — studios to three-bedrooms priced from \$585,000 to \$2.1 million — and half have sold in two months, according to Joel Breitkopf, a principal of Alchemy Properties, the developer.

He ascribes the sales numbers, at least in part, to all the metal that dresses the building to stand out among competitors. “Glass has led to too many monolithic facades,” Mr. Breitkopf said. “They’re like office buildings.”

Last year, metal exterior walls — mostly stainless steel, aluminum and zinc — accounted for 18 percent of all new multifamily buildings nationwide, a 50 percent jump from 2004, according to the Metal Initiative, a program by the metal industry to promote the use of metal materials in buildings.

Metal can be cheaper to install, because of fewer engineered parts and less labor involved. And typically it is a better insulator than glass, so air-conditioners don’t have to work as hard — a factor earning it environmental plaudits, according to developers, manufacturers and architects.

Metal’s decorative potential, though, is its most praiseworthy quality, they said. It is fairly easy to tint and shape.

At 51 Walker Street, off Church Street in TriBeCa, aluminum with etched and layered contours is a credible stand-in for cast iron, the area’s historic building material.

In fact, without the metal facade, the condo, whose 15 two-bedrooms closed this winter, would most likely not have won approval by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Glass and other choices would probably have been rejected as not in keeping with the style of the neighborhood, and cast iron would have been prohibitively expensive, said John Cetra, the architect.

Glass-walled homes are as old as Modernism; in urban settings, they received validation when Richard Meier built a trio of con-

dos near the Hudson River, architects say.

Yet wraparound windows may not be appealing without scenic views, said Jared Della Valle, the architect of 245 10th Avenue, a planned luxury condo at West 24th Street, whose lot hooks around the back of a gas station.

So a stainless steel wall, punctuated by a few windows, is needed to screen it, Mr. Della Valle said.

Since February, a quarter of the building’s 19 one- and two-bedrooms have sold, at prices ranging from \$1.75 million to \$6.2 million, according to a spokeswoman for Grasso Holdings, the Philadelphia-based developer.

Also, in the last few years, lasers have allowed for smaller cutting machines, ones that can fit in an architect’s office. Now, more design trials can take place in-house. At 245 10th Avenue, that process created the raised diamond patterns that will grace the steel, according to Mr. Della Valle.

With metal, “the ingredients aren’t new,” he said. “It’s just that the opportunities are greater.”