

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

April 27, 2016

Construction Begins on SHoP's American Copper Buildings in New York City

The New York-based firm's design features two buildings connected by a dramatic
three-story sky bridge

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A rendering shows SHoP's current Manhattan project, the American Copper Buildings.

A pair of tilting apartment towers now under construction on Manhattan's far east side is bringing a stretch of humdrum riverfront some serious architectural pizzazz. Designed by [SHoP Architects](#), the recently topped-out buildings at 626 First Avenue feature distinctively bent profiles that suggest a dancing couple, their backs gracefully arched. Rising 41 and 48 floors, the two structures are linked in the middle by a three-story sky bridge—the highest in the city—containing a lounge area and a 75-foot lap pool with dramatic views.

“We thought about how we could push the idea of a residential tower in terms of form but also stay within the site’s prescribed envelope,” says SHoP principal Gregg Pasquarelli. “The idea we came up with was to have one building fold north-south and the other fold east-west. Then where they come closest together, we thought about connecting them with this public amenity space—it’s like the moment in a tango when the arm goes around the small of the back.”



A three-story sky bridge will link the structures and include a swimming pool.

The towers, created for JDS Development Group, have been named the American Copper Buildings, thanks to another eye-catching feature: their shimmering metal façades. While the sides looking east and west are entirely glass, the windows on the north and south exposures are framed by copper panels—some 5,000 of them, weighing a total of more than four million pounds. “I don’t think anyone had ever done a copper building that tall,” says Pasquarelli. “We really liked the idea that the material comes as this super-shiny penny, then mellows to a kind of chocolate-brown and eventually turns green.” Just how long that process will take isn’t certain—anywhere from a decade to half a century. Pasquarelli notes that they could have treated the copper to make it green from the get-go, but given the building’s highly visible location next to FDR Drive, the East River Ferry’s 34th Street terminal, and the Midtown Tunnel, they decided to leave the metal raw. “We thought it would be cool for the whole city to be able to watch it age and develop a patina, until it becomes the color of the Statue of Liberty,” he says. “We thought of it almost as a building performance art piece for New York.”



A rendering of the project shows the view from inside the sky bridge.

The buildings will contain 761 rental apartments, 20 percent of which have been designated as affordable housing. Amenities include a fitness center, hammam, yoga studio, rock-climbing wall, screening room, and rooftop deck with an infinity-edge pool. SHoP is devising the finishes, fixtures, and cabinetry for the residences as well as overseeing all aspects of the decor for the public spaces. Outdoors, the landscape firm [Scape](#) is designing a 38,000-square-foot park with storm buffers that would offer protection in the event of flooding from the East River.

The refinements and amenities in the American Copper Buildings, which are slated for completion by early 2017, aim to be on par with those of high-end condo properties. It's the same strategy behind another high-profile collaboration between SHoP and JDS, the recently approved 73-story rental apartment tower in downtown Brooklyn, which will be that borough's tallest structure. Says Pasquarelli, "Our client, Michael Stern at JDS, has said that his goal is to reposition how people think about rental buildings."

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