

Across New York City, Private Garden Landscapes Are the Latest Designer Draw

Meticulously manicured green spaces are major selling points at three new projects

By Sarah Archer
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Robert Spurr Studio designed a series of terraces for 77 Greenwich, a new tower in Manhattan. Evan Joseph Studios

Scholars' gardens, haciendas, glass-enclosed greenhouses: There's nothing quite so magical as a private garden space where plants and flowers thrive, secluded from everyone except the birds, butterflies, and those few humans in possession of a key. [Gramercy Park](#), the famed two-acre landscape in Manhattan that's accessible to only those who live in immediately surrounding buildings, sets the precedent when it comes to private green spaces in the city. Rare other examples, such as the [Macdougall-Sullivan garden](#) that connects 21 row houses in Greenwich Village, are equally celebrated—and coveted.

The seemingly universal appeal of such gardens has informed a clear trend in real estate. Even before COVID-19, forward-thinking developers were tapping renowned architects to design innovative outdoor spaces for their luxury projects, and the pandemic has only made this amenity more desirable. Three new residences in New York have been built with custom green spaces, underscoring the appeal of beautifully landscaped features in the city's competitive real estate market.



The vista from 77 Greenwich.

[Future Green Studio](#), a Brooklyn-based garden design firm, is known for designing the rooftop garden at the Brooklyn Children's Museum and two projects for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The firm draws inspiration from historical gardens all over the world, says principal Aaron Booher. "I think [Japanese gardens](#) are certainly an example of the way humans have been trying to integrate nature into our living environments in many different forms for ages," he says.

For [77 Greenwich](#), a new tower designed by [Deborah Berke Partners](#) at the southern tip of Manhattan, Booher and the team at Future Green sought to create landscaped spaces that are easy for residents to access, with terraces on the 12th, 41st, and 42nd floors (the last of which is the largest, running nearly the length of a full city block and the width of a tennis court). On the 41st floor terrace, some plantings from outside extend into the interior, where they brighten a shared fitness space. Booher chose varied, hardy plants and trees, native plants that provide year-round visual splendor, and shrubs that can withstand the wind and weather that comes with the territory when designing for a sky-top perch.



Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates' design concept for the Front & York development in Brooklyn.

Just across the river in DUMBO, [Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates](#) has created one of the largest parks in Brooklyn for the new development [Front & York](#), which was designed by Morris Adjmi. It doesn't feel like a typical courtyard garden—even a really spacious one. It much more closely resembles a city park, spanning the area of five basketball courts. It's fitting, since MVVA is perhaps best known for their design of the nearby Brooklyn Bridge Park. The building's design situates residences above the gardens, making it part of the vista as well as a place to explore and enjoy mature trees and fragrant flowers.

This project, like 77 Greenwich, was well underway before COVID-19 hit, but the events of 2020 have only reaffirmed much of what the team at MVVA has long understood about the importance of building natural spaces in cities. "The pandemic has made us all keenly aware of our relationship to the outdoors in a way that will continue to be a desired aspect of our lives," says Scott Streeb, associate principal at Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates. "The conversation about green space as an amenity is shifting from 'What recreational activities can we offer?' to 'How can we offer a true connection to nature?' While no one will argue that a bocce court isn't fun, there is also a need for more passive open-air spaces where people can simply be in nature."

For developers, such spaces are a key way to lure in buyers, especially now. "In today's world, access to the outdoors is paramount, and landscape architects are making significant contributions to real estate developments," says Jason Schreiber, principal of investments of CIM Group, a codeveloper of Front & York. "Exceptional architecture and masterfully designed interiors are important to discerning buyers, and the same thoughtfulness should be applied to the design of their building's green space."



One Manhattan Square features a parklike space designed by Dutch firm West 8 Urban Design and Landscape Architecture. Evan Joseph Studios



A wood pergola in one part of the private outdoor landscape, which stretches out over an acre. Evan Joseph Studios

Another firm working on such projects is Dutch design studio [West 8 Urban Design and Landscape Architecture](#), whose bespoke space for [One Manhattan Square](#), the 800-foot-tall glass tower on the Lower East Side, is as grand as one might expect from the practice that renovated London's Jubilee Gardens, a centerpiece of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebration and the 2012 Olympics. For One Manhattan Square, West 8 has designed an old-world-style park spread over about one acre with details that evoke European gardens, including geometric topiaries, a sumac meander for peaceful strolls, a tea garden, and clusters of birch trees.

According to Adriaan Geuze, the firm's director, seasonality was foremost in their minds when selecting species for this project, which resulted in a brilliant array of colors that shifts but never fades. "We have crafted a fine balance between verdant evergreen and exciting seasonal planting," he says. "These create specific moments of animation throughout the year."

Though the Netherlands is home to the historic 17th-century "Tulip Mania" (and much of the world's tulip exports to this day), Geuze notes that his native country and Manhattan have something very important in common today. "The Netherlands, much like New York City, is a melting pot of different cultures and nationalities. We have embraced this richness of experiences in our work approach, and in this design, we have brought a diverse series of themed gardens. These allow different touchstones for reflection that, in the ultimate goal, bring the residents of One Manhattan Square together." Fittingly, that feeling of togetherness is more in demand than ever right now.