

Creating Spaces for Tweens and Teens

By JAKE MOONEY SEPT. 9, 2011

IT may seem improbable to suburban tweens, whiling away the after-school hours in front of a video-game console in a friend's basement, but even in Manhattan, people in their age group get bored.

Enter the latest amenity in new condominiums. First there were children's playrooms, with cushioned mats and toys, in seemingly every new building's common area. Now, in an amenities race that includes climbing walls, golf simulators and screening rooms, some buildings are offering spaces for residents too old for the sandbox but too young to stray far from home.

The buildings tend to be new construction, on lots large enough to allow ample amenity space and, with a few exceptions, just slightly removed from major entertainment and shopping corridors like Broadway. They include the Aldyn, at 60 Riverside Boulevard; 170 East End Avenue; and the Edge, on the Williamsburg, Brooklyn, waterfront.

Parents say that outside of programmed activities like music lessons there is actually very little that New York's preteens and young teenagers can do without a chaperon. The spaces in the new buildings — called tween rooms, teen rooms or simply lounges — appeal to parents who want their children to have something to do and gain a sense of independence, but in a secure, nearby place.

Barbara Russo, a senior vice president of the Corcoran Group who handles sales for 170 East End Avenue, said she recalled what her own daughter, who is now 21, did for entertainment growing up on the Upper East Side.

“They were hanging out at Starbucks or just walking around the streets of Manhattan; that’s what they do, unless they’re going to a movie,” she said, adding that she often noticed clusters of young people on the sidewalks outside the buildings she shows. Besides a yoga studio, and basketball and squash courts, 170 East End has a video arcade, with games including Dance Dance Revolution. “When the teenagers come,” Ms. Russo said, “they’re flipping out over it.”

The appeal may extend to the whole family. “Frankly, I don’t want a bunch of kids in my apartment either, but I do want them close by,” said Beth Stern, the director of sales at the Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group, which is handling sales at the Laurel, at 400 East 67th Street. The building has a teen-oriented game room.

The Azure, at 333 East 91st Street, has a teen lounge with pool and foosball tables alongside its gym and children’s playroom. Such varied facilities are about targeted marketing, said Karen Mansour, the executive vice president for sales and marketing at DE Developments, which represents the building.

“You want to include certain things so that you’re not only selling the building, but a lifestyle,” she said. Three- and four-bedroom apartments in the building, the types of unit that families of tweens might buy, are listed for \$1.7 million to \$5.6 million.

There is, of course, no age limit on the appeal of a game room. At the Edge, in Williamsburg, “the idea in the back of our head was, we have the children’s playroom,” said Highlyann Krasnow, a partner at MNS, which handles sales for the building. “We need something for the older teens and younger 20-somethings who are inevitably going to be being there. And older adults too.”

One Brooklyn Bridge Park, another recently opened building that the company also represents, has similar amenities, she said.

Yet while the rooms — with air hockey and foosball — are open to all, she said, families with children tend to be particularly drawn to them.

Buyers looking for tween rooms can decide, too, what type of emphasis they want. At the Aldyn, said Beth Fisher, the senior marketing director at the Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group, there is a tilt toward the physical.

“The trick is, to me as a parent: How do I get my kid out of the environment that’s in front of a screen?” said Ms. Fisher, who is the mother of a 17-year-old girl. “How do I get them interacting with other people?” As the Aldyn has table tennis, a bowling alley and a pool, she added, the atmosphere is less basement rec room and more upscale summer camp.

At the Laureate, at 2150 Broadway on the Upper West Side, about 90 percent of the 70 units are three-bedrooms and larger, said Shlomi Reuveni of BHS Select, which represents the project. Consequently, he said, activities for children of all ages were important. The Laureate’s tween room, though, has an emphasis on education: the building hired three staff members from the nearby Collegiate School as contractors to consult on its design.

One of them, Meera Ratnesar, says the tween room has a library, computer terminals equipped with Google Earth and other potentially educational programs, and, importantly, comfortable furniture for relaxing. Many children in Manhattan, said Ms. Ratnesar, who is now head of a private middle school in California, tend to be overscheduled with school and extracurricular activities.

In downtime, she said, “twens these days are really in that hangout mode. They just like the idea of sitting next to a friend, and they may not even be talking to each other, but just that companionship is important.”

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