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COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

Harlem Condo Project Is a Study in Modernism

Circa Central Park is changing the look of Frederick Douglass Circle



A rendering of Circa Central Park. PHOTO: SEVENTH ART

By Josh Barbanel

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In some places swords are beaten into plowshares. In New York, gas stations are leveled, decontaminated and turned into condominiums.

This time, the site of a onetime BP gas station is being transformed into a curved condominium with a distinctive modern look that is changing Frederick Douglass Circle, on the northwest corner of Central Park at West 110th Street.

The shape of Circa Central Park can be seen in crude outline in the bare concrete floor slabs and flapping construction tarps visible on the 11-story residential building.

— ADVERTISEMENT —





A rendering of a living room at Circa Central Park. PHOTO: SEVENTH ART

When it opens next year, with both market-rate and affordable units, the condo will have set-back walls of tinted glass and protruding white horizontal metallic bands that wind around the traffic circle and curve gently round the corner toward Frederick Douglass Boulevard. The street, one of Harlem's main avenues, is home to a new wave of condo and rental buildings, restaurants, cafes

and bars.

A sales office for Circa Central Park is to open this month. Prices on 38 market-rate units range from just over \$1 million to \$10.5 million for a five-bedroom penthouse with a private terrace.

Prices on 10 affordable units will range from about \$227,000 to nearly \$384,000, according to condo filings. They will be offered through a lottery this year.

Dan Kaplan, a senior partner at FXFOWLE Architects, said the strong horizontal curves, an echo of 20th-century modern architecture, aim to create a distinctive look that celebrates Central Park and the "unbelievable" curve of the traffic circle, at one of the park's four corner entrances.



The site, seen here under construction, was for decades home to a gas station. PHOTO: KEVIN HAGEN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

While most buildings in New York are hemmed in by rectangular sites and can be viewed only at an angle, Circa Central Park offered a rare opportunity to do something that can be studied from many sides.

"This is the grandest of them all," Mr. Kaplan said of the wide traffic circle on West 110th Street and the juncture of Central Park West and Frederick Douglass Boulevard.

The others are the better-known Columbus Circle, Grand Army Plaza and Duke Ellington Circle on Fifth Avenue and 110th Street.

A few years ago, the Circa Central Park site was a BP service station. City records show it was a gas station as far back as 1934. Before that it was the home of a billiard parlor and

dance hall.

The city condemned the property in the 1970s for urban renewal, eventually paying \$221,000 to the Mobil Oil Corp., but then sold it to another service-station owner in 1996, with the right to buy it back again within 20 years.



The sweeping view from the new building. PHOTO: KEVIN HAGEN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

In 2013, the city's Economic Development Corp. again took title to the building and sold it to the current developer, Artimus, for \$25.5 million. Artimus

excavated the site to remove gasoline storage tanks and contaminated soil.

Many of the apartments are large family-style units with balconies and terraces, including 17 three-bedroom apartments with an average price of just over \$3.5 million.

The idea was to appeal to the “migration of buyers up from the West Side,” especially households needing more space “who are looking for value,” said Shlomi Reuveni, managing director of TOWN New Development, which is overseeing sales.

The building has series of setbacks and balconies, some with views stretching from the neo-gothic Cathedral of St. John the Divine to the Empire State Building. It will have many amenities, including a study room and a private interior courtyard and garden.



A rendering of the courtyard. PHOTO: SEVENTH ART

The long curving lines of windows will face southwest, broken up by two-tone vertical fins to provide shade and reduce heat. One side, facing the park, will be green. The other side, facing northward to the brick buildings of Harlem, will be painted reddish brown.

After the curve ends at the north side of the building, it has a more conventional

design facing West 111th Street, with a brick facade that connects it to older buildings on the block.

Circa will face two 20-story condominium towers across Frederick Douglass Boulevard, known as the Towers in the Park condominium, that have wide straight street fronts.

“We have this amazing circle,” Mr. Kaplan said. “Unfortunately, unlike Columbus circle, other buildings didn’t celebrate the curve and didn’t embrace it.”

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