

■ SPECIAL REPORT ■

LANDSCAPING

NEW YORK PROPERTIES ADD WELLNESS SPACES

Architects in the city are increasingly adding meditation gardens to luxury projects, enticing busy urban residents with their stress-busting benefits, writes **Peta Tomlinson**



Ziv Lavi, landscape architect and managing partner of Turf Landscape Design Inc, hopes the gardens he's created at New York's 505 W 43 condo will inspire people to slow down. Photo: 505 W 43

The latest trend in landscaping goes beyond aesthetics and practical function, to something more ethereal.

Meditation gardens are carving a niche in high-end residential developments, and according to Morris Adjmi, principal and founder of the New York City architecture and design firm of the same name, it's about time.

"I think this is a very real and valid response to a rediscovered need, to hold space and time to reduce the emotional and physical stress we carry," he explains. "Within New York City, specifically, we are certainly noticing a Zen garden trend as people seek a peaceful space to connect with nature."

Adjmi, creator of the Zen garden at Förena in Chelsea, insists that there's more to it than just a fancy name. Whereas everyone can benefit from time spent in any garden, the difference is that meditation gardens are intentionally designed to calm the mind through uncluttered minimalism. Ergo, "every detail is carefully considered for its ability to imbue the environment with a sense of calm".

The garden, which Adjmi describes as "a peaceful retreat built for mind, body and soul", fits the building's raison d'être as an "island of calm" at the intersection of some of downtown Manhattan's busiest neighbourhoods: Greenwich Village, Chelsea and Flat Iron.

"The garden is set in the back away from the street and aligns with a windowed corridor that all residents will walk along from the lift to their units," he explains. "So there will always be a view into the garden, allowing an experience even when not inhabiting."

"Once the space was carved out, we assembled a cool and calming palette of natural materials, including sustainably sourced stone and wood, as well as traditional elements such as a rock garden and planted Japanese maples. The horizontal wooden screens provide privacy and help achieve the effect of being transported out of the city and into nature. Smooth, oversized concrete pavers provide the perfect surface for meditation, prayer, and exercise."

Max Cohen, director of design-build, Future Green Studio, agrees the trend was born of necessity. "Quiet indoor space is limited in the city, so it is beneficial to have a communal outdoor space that allows people to find inspiration and leave their stresses behind," he says.

In designing the meditation garden at Jolie, a luxury condo at 77 Greenwich Street in Manhattan's financial district, he used immersive planting beds and trellis structures to create a series of outdoor "rooms".

"The spaces offer refuge and frame views of the surrounding city and sky, inspiring relaxation and reflection," Cohen explains. "A system of vine trellises around

the edges softens the view of the neighbouring buildings and make the spaces feel more comfortable in scale.

A mix of lawns, timber decks, paved surfaces and built-in lounge benches allows for formal outdoor meditation and other active uses, or nooks to just sit and think. Vines, perennials, and small-scale trees create a garden that changes with the seasons, connecting people to the cycles of the natural world.

"Many of the spaces, including the rock garden, are framed in large windows in the amenities areas which extends the enjoyment of these features to the interior," says Cohen.

Ziv Lavi, landscape architect and managing partner of Turf Landscape Design Inc, hopes the gardens he has created at 505 West 43rd will inspire people to slow down. The 6,000 sq ft, open-air courtyard and landscaped garden located off an indoor lap pool is a defining feature of the new luxury condo in Midtown Manhattan, simply titled 505 W 43 and designed by architecture firm ODA, with interiors by Andres Escobar & Associates.

"There is an inherent peaceful quality to plants that stems from one basic fact – they are alive, yet they cannot move," Lavi explains. "The world washes over them – the sun, the rain, the wind. And yet, they thrive and grow. When beings like us, who are in constant movement, try to slow down for a minute to meditate, we tend to naturally flock to nature's slower and more enduring elements."

A meditation garden should "allow one to wonder a bit" and to look within. "It should use natural materials and rich earth-tone colours in small-scale spaces and, most notably, it should not feel staged and architectural," Lavi says.

"It should maintain a layering of planting to create the feel of a naturally occurring environment. In the end, such gardens need to give us a moment just long enough for us to stop moving – and meditate."

Other New York City condos following this trend include Rose Hill. Developed by Rockefeller Group, and designed by CetraRuddy, the courtyard on the lobby level is like a "secret

garden" filled with greenery, and offering individual seating areas where residents can unwind without interruption. Studios start at US\$1.525 million for 601 square feet, all the way up to US\$19.5 million for a four-bedroom unit of 4,657 square feet.

And at 40 Bleecker in NoHo, landscape architect Edmund Hollander's 5,600 sq ft courtyard garden is a versatile space that adapts for both privacy and gathering, reflecting pools and waterfalls completing the full sensory experience. Of a total of 61 one- to five-bedroom residences, including seven penthouses, more than 90 per cent have sold with the remaining inventory starting at US\$4.5 million for a 1,506 sq ft two-bedroom unit.

BUYING GUIDE

What you can buy from US\$1.68 million:
A 842 sq ft one-bedroom unit at Jolie, a new luxury condo in Manhattan's financial district. The building's expansive outdoor space, designed by Future Green Studio, includes a 3,600 sq ft rooftop garden featuring a grassy lawn with a play area for children, a meditation deck and grill stations with ample dining areas and chaise seating. The amenities located on the 41st floor below open up to 950 sq ft of outdoor space including a Japanese rock garden, while a 2,350 sq ft lower floor terrace features pergolas and a dog run. Prices range up to US\$3 million for a three-bedroom unit.

What you can buy from US\$1.49 million:
A one-bedroom unit of 665 square feet at Förena, a condo positioned as an "island of calm" at the intersection of some of downtown Manhattan's busiest neighbourhoods. As well as a Zen Garden designed by Morris Adjmi, residents enjoy use of an expansive landscaped rooftop complete with outdoor dining facilities, including a kitchen with gas grill. Units are priced up to US\$3.5 million for 1,289 square feet. Penthouse pricing is available on request.



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