

THE REAL DEAL



One Jackson Square is slated for completion in October.

The architects at Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates (KPF), the firm responsible for the nearly completed **One Jackson Square** at 122 Greenwich Avenue, are all grown-ups — an odd, but important point to bring up here in New York, where the maturity of our architects is hardly something that can be taken for granted.

In fact, in a city where too much product is shoddy or pretentious, it is rare to feel that a firm's buildings will neither embarrass the city nor impede citizens. On the contrary, KPF principal William Pedersen and his team of architects design effortlessly elegant and exciting buildings that are as rewarding to look at as they are to inhabit. The people at KPF, almost to an unprecedented degree among their architectural contemporaries, are immune from hype and nonsense, from the irrepressible need to design clamorously iconic buildings that are hardly functional and that, ultimately, have little going for them other than the allure of a fast-fading contemporaneity.

For the past 30 years, KPF has produced important and commanding buildings both here and abroad, among them the Baruch College Annex and the New York University Law School. Whether or not we needed a Jets Stadium on the Far West

Side is now a moot question. But if it had been built, New York City could now boast one of the most elegant and forward-looking sports arenas in the country, far finer than the new Citi Field or Yankee Stadium, with their drably historicist language of forms.

A case in point is One Jackson Square. Even in a state of near-completion — construction is slated to wrap up next month — the 35-unit development by Hines Interests and Aby Rosen exhibits a measured application of Deconstructivist style that makes it classier than the neighboring Winka Dubbledam-designed 497 Greenwich Street.

One Jackson Square's most impressive visual fact is a series of uneven surfaces, almost wobbly in the relation of individual stories to the façade as a whole. But this deconstructed idiom ultimately resolves itself into a kind of well-modulated harmony. Consisting of a five-story slab to the southeast connected to an 11-story tower to the north, there is no volumetric daring-do to the structure, no spiraling forms or sharply angled masses, such as we have come to expect from other architects who use the Deconstructivist idiom. This tame, "lite" form of deconstruction does not seek to give the impression that the structure itself, let alone the world around it, is falling down and that everything is going to hell. Rather, it takes a once-radical idiom and finds a conservative core of decency within it.

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I know: That all sounds so dreary and counter-revolutionary, so very different from what we have come to expect and desire from our leading architects. The people at KPF themselves might prefer a more rounded condemnation than such apparently faint praise. But in the context of New York architecture — famous for its generally undistinguished building stock — this new addition will prove sufficiently dramatic to qualify as an iconic building. Its somewhat serpentine form and the fractured glass of the façade are all daring enough to leave their mark on the neighborhood.

The architects at Kohn Pedersen Fox are less likely to start revolutions than to end them. They cannot claim the honor of initiating a style that has dazzled the world: Rather, they have taken the formal innovations of others and elevated them. As a result, they have been able to alter their style to suit the time, and to do so without loss of artistic integrity, in the knowledge that effective architecture consists of obedience to certain formal principles more than to certain forms. Thus it does not matter whether one is a Contextualist or a Deconstructivist — and the architects at KPF have been both at one time or another. The important thing is to create competently and responsibly within one's chosen style.

Before One Jackson Square came into being, there was nothing on the spot other than a parking lot, the kiss of death for any Manhattan neighborhood. For the longest time there were reports of drug addicts and derelicts in the area. Now we can all be happy that aboveground parking lots are dying out in Manhattan. Almost anywhere in the world that you see them, you also see a depressed real estate market and a lack of civic self-esteem. And yet, there was no small stirring of

controversy over the attempt to build this project in this space. It was argued, predictably, that the somewhat Deconstructivist design did not suit the overwhelmingly low-lying, 19th-century buildings that define the Village.

There is something to that, but not a great deal. For in an important sense, One Jackson Square is a contextualist building. Within the context of West 14th Street and the Far West Side, this structure fits in fairly well. Especially in the ribbon windows that stretch along its façade, it recalls those rounded hard-core Modernist buildings that were once radical, in the days of Eric Mendelsohn early in the 20th century or of Oscar Niemeyer's work in São Paulo at the middle of the century. Such associations in turn recall the mid-century modernism that abounds in this part of the city, along Varick Street and other places in the West Village.

Even in its partial state of completion, perhaps what most distinguishes One Jackson Square, whose apartments range from \$2.4 to \$21 million, is that all-important feeling one has of its being well made. There is no sense here, or anywhere else in a KPF project, of value engineering or cut corners. The glass glows, then beams feel sturdy, the materials of the infill and the metal braces of the ribbon windows all feel solidly conceived and professionally executed.