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In Jersey City First On The Block With A Rooftop Lounge

Nearly three decades after the LeFrak Organization began transforming a rail yard along the Jersey City waterfront into a planned community of glassy office towers and soaring residences, it has built the neighborhood's first luxury high-rise, a blue-glass-and-steel tower that overlooks the Hudson.

At 600 acres, the Newport neighborhood dwarfs the 92-acre Battery Park City in Manhattan. But while Battery Park City has ample luxury housing, Newport's developer has not ventured into the luxury market until now. For years Newport was a patchwork of isolated high-rises creating an almost corporate atmosphere. Its main attractions were cheaper rents and a short PATH train ride to Manhattan.

But Newport has grown up and now has several restaurants, a gourmet supermarket, shops, a private school and a new waterfront park that organizes summer events. When the 19-story Laguna opens this month at 45 Park Lane South, it will be the first in the neighborhood to offer luxuries like a rooftop lounge, a screening room, a fitness center and a children's playroom.

"Newport really has evolved," said Matt Brown, a broker with the Hudson Realty Group at Halstead Property. "The addition of the waterfront park was just huge. It's really spectacular. Ten years ago I had a lot of people complaining that the buildings were dated, and you didn't have a park or a grocery store."

When LeFrak broke ground on Newport in 1986, this slice of the Hudson River waterfront was an outpost of warehouses and rail yards. For decades, LeFrak developed the site, shying away from luxury residential as the neighborhood lacked key amenities to draw high-end tenants. But eventually the Jersey City waterfront transformed, and luxury towers started to rise in other parts of the city. Today Newport has 15,000 residents and 20,000 office workers. Once-quiet streets are bustling with office workers and babies in strollers.

The Laguna has a modern aesthetic, with interiors designed by the Stephen B. Jacobs Group and Andi Pepper Interior Design, the team that designed the Edge in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and the Hotel Gansevoort in Manhattan. Apartments have views of the New York City skyline and kitchens with stainless-steel appliances,

espresso-colored cabinets and quartz countertops. West Elm and BoConcept decorated the model apartments.

“This building was, for us, a pretty dramatic step up,” said Mario Gaztambide, the vice president for residential asset management of the LeFrak Organization.

Interest in the 158-unit building has been strong. Since leasing began in early June, LeFrak has rented 40 percent of the units. Tenants will begin moving in in mid-July, although many of the upper floors are still under construction.

The rents reflect the Laguna’s upscale image: one-bedrooms start at \$2,790 a month, two-bedrooms at \$3,790; the remaining three-bedroom rents for \$6,300. The 2,000-square-foot penthouse, a three-bedroom apartment with floor-to-ceiling windows and a 1,000-square-foot private terrace, has not been priced yet.

The Laguna’s offerings might be a bargain by Manhattan standards, where the median rent in the second quarter was \$3,500 a month, according to data provided by Trulia.com. But they are high for Jersey City, whose median over the same period was \$1,900 a month.

“There is a demand and people are paying up for it because there is very little supply,” said Ritu Kothari, who signed a lease with her husband, Deep, for a 1,750-square-foot three-bedroom at the Laguna for \$4,620 a month. With a baby due in October, the couple wanted more space than they have in their two-bedroom in Midtown Manhattan. “If you want a big space in a location that’s nice,” she said, “you have to pay up for it.”

The Laguna is a short walk from the Hoboken and Newport PATH stations, which both offer a 15-minute ride to Midtown or the World Trade Center. The building also overlooks Newport Green, a 4.25-acre waterfront park with a carousel that opened last year. On a scorching recent summer morning, toddlers dashed through playground sprinklers, and sunbathers lounged on an artificial beach overlooking the riverfront esplanade.

The Laguna marks the beginning of the end of development for Newport, as it is the first building to be complete in the final phase of the project. LeFrak plans four to six more commercial and residential buildings, which will translate into another 3,000 residential units, Mr. Gaztambide said.

“What’s going to characterize this next phase of development is, it is all going to happen around this park,” he added, referring to Newport Green. “It is something that, we believe, sets this apart.”

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