

Getting Back on Track with Style

With a concentrated effort to revitalize the downtown of Cliffside Park, N.J., Park Town Centre—13 stories of rental apartments atop a two-story retail level—was eyed as a way to bring new energy into a tired business district.

CHALLENGE

Find a more efficient and cost-effective structural façade system to complete a planned mixed-use development that ran into economic issues.

INFLUENCE

Town officials in Cliffside Park, N.J., had big plans for revitalizing their downtown when they began assembling properties for a new, signature mixed-use development back in 2002.

CRITERIA

The central location and magnificent opportunity for views across the Hudson River to Manhattan would seem to make the Town Centre's site a no-brainer for a signature residential high-rise. But the area had, instead, languished, earning the designation of "redevelopment zone" when this project was first envisioned. Cliffside Park planners hoped the effort

would kick-start interest in the surrounding downtown district. The quick access to the George Washington Bridge would also provide a more affordable housing option than Manhattan.

"The intent was that it was going to replace under-utilized properties to revitalize the center of town," says James T. Virgona, architect with Edgewater, N.J.-based Virgona + Virgona Architects and the designer of the project. However, just as the 3.3-acre property was secured, the Great Recession put the project on hold. When it started up again, a new hurdle emerged: under-surface conditions including a base of extremely hard rock and a previously unknown underground spring. The latter forced the design team back to the drawing board, as it meant the entire project had to be raised by 4 ft. to 5 ft. Already leaning toward "classically inspired modernism," Virgona doubled down on this approach as

the raised site began to resemble a plinth—the base of many traditional Greek and Roman columns. That plinth has taken the finished form of a broad public plaza, with a decorative fountain and surrounded on three sides by two stories of retail space.

Virgona's design incorporates a staggered-truss structural system that frees up interior space. Using floor-to-ceiling steel trusses in a pattern that alternates from floor to floor, this approach transfers the entire building load to exterior columns. "The structural system used about half the steel as a typical design," Virgona says—though he noted the 13-story project still required more structural steel than was used in New York City's Madison Square Garden.

SOLUTION

SlenderWall assemblies, which combine an exterior architectural precast concrete panel with vapor barrier, closed-cell foam insulation and galvanized framing studs, provided significant labor savings. The panels' unique M-shape also allowed for larger windows, giving future tenants even greater access to dramatic views of the Manhattan skyline.

As is typically the case, the staggered truss system was paired with precast concrete plank flooring. The floor planks were fabricated with embed plates for connecting the SlenderWall exterior panels. This installation process was choreographed to such a degree that, according to Virgona, "the panel façade was being applied to the building even as the structure above was still being constructed."



Park Town Centre
Cliffside Park, N.J.

Design Team: **Virgona + Virgona Architects**

PRODUCT SPECS:
SlenderWall Exterior Panels
in Acid-Washed

SlenderWall
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PROJECT SPECS



NATURAL STONE LOOK
Acid-washed and sand-blasted finish options ensured both designer and developer would get the natural stone appearance along with extensive decorative reveals and projections they desired.