First Step Housing

Location_New York, New York, USA
Date_2001–7
Nonprofit developer_Common Ground Community, Housing Development Fund Corporation
End client_Homeless and transient population
Design teams_Rafi Elbaz, Nanna Wulfing, Julia Tate (Kit of Parts), Katherine Chang, Aaron Gabriel (The Ordering of Things)
Project architect_DCV Architects
Structural engineer_Dominick Pilla, PE, PC
Electrical engineer_Chester Schiff, PE
Mechanical engineer_Abraham Joselow, PE, PC
General contractor_ACC Construction
Additional consultants_Michael Bell, Architecture League of New York
Major funding_City of New York Department of Housing Preservation and Development, New York State Homeless Housing Assistance Corporation, New York State Homeless Housing Assistance Program, New York City Department of Homeless Services, Dormitory Authority of the State of New York
Total budget_$6.4 million
Cost per unit_Under $5,000
Area per unit_68 sq. ft / 5.6 sq. m
Website_www.commonground.org

A prototype of the **First Step Housing** competition entry: "**The Ordering of Things**," by **Katherine Chang and Aaron Gabriel**. The design was one of two winning schemes that will be further developed for use in the renovated Andrews House.

Top and above
A prototype of "Kit of Parts," designed by Rafi Elbaz, Nanna Wulfing, and Julia Tate of the New York firm LifeForm. The unit, along with Chang and Gabriel's "The Ordering of Things," will be used in the Andrews House.

Opposite
Details of Chang and Gabriel's prototype, "The Order of Things."
All other photographs Bert Bono

partially occupied lodging house on the Bowery, with the aim of resuscitating and rethinking this dwindling shelter resource.

The requirements of the program necessitated innovation. The building was long and narrow, minimizing daylight. Stringent fire codes meant that the units had to be constructed from noncombustible materials and ensure 70 percent sprinkler coverage. What's more, in order to avoid a lengthy permit process, no unit could alter the building's structure, systems, or permanent walls and spaces. Each unit had to be, in a sense, a piece of furniture.

In 2003 Common Ground hosted an international design competition to enlist the help of architects in overcoming these structural and programming challenges. Designers were charged with developing a prefabricated "individual dwelling unit," no larger than 60 square feet (5.6 sq. m). More than 180 teams entered the competition, from which the jury selected five finalists. Today Common Ground is working with two of the finalists ("Kit of Parts," by designers Rafi Elbaz, Nanna Wulfing, and Julia Tate from the New York firm LifeForm, and "The Ordering of Things," by New York designers Katherine Chang and Aaron Gabriel) to bring their projects to life. Prototypes were built in summer 2005, and the renovation is expected to be complete by spring 2007.

The greatest humanitarian challenge we face today is that of providing shelter. First Step Housing -Recognizing the legitimate and important role this housing type played in providing low-cost, flexible shelter, in 2002 Common Ground purchased the Andrews house, a partially occupied lodging house on the bowery, with the aim of resuscitating and rethinking this dwindling shelter source. The requirement of the program necessitated innovation. Each unit had to be in a sense, a piece of furniture. In 2003 Common Ground hosted an international competition to enlist the help of architects in overcoming these structural and programming challenges. Designers were challenged with developing a prefabricated "individual dwelling unit". Today Common Ground is working with two of the finalists ("Kit of Parts " by Designer Rafi Elbaz, Nanna Woulfing, and Julia Tate from the New York firm Lifeform) to bring their projects to life. Prototypes were built in the summer 2005, and the renovation is expected to be completed by spring 2007.

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