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House114

Bedford-Stuyvesant, New York

By Rafi Elbaz

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An Urban Oasis Designed for Wellness

When the award-winning Israeli-born, Brooklyn-based architect Rafi Elbaz first laid eyes on the 2,500 square foot deserted home at 114 Monroe Street — a two-story Colonial on the border of Clinton Hill and Bedford-Stuyvesant — he knew it was the perfect subject for his next residential development. “I just loved the bones of the building and subtle details of the limestone facade,” says Elbaz of encountering the original stonework which dates back to 1899. “It was painted layers of yellow cream, but still in very good condition.”

Elbaz is no stranger to reshaping architectural gems. He spent the better part of 2017–18 constructing one of his elegantly eco-friendly landmark restoration on a four-story, 3,800 square foot townhouse at 185 Macdonough in Stuyvesant Heights. He is also responsible for notable residential projects in North Williamsburg and award-winning transitional housing built in New York on behalf of Habitat for Humanity that was later exhibited at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Still, there was something that appealed beyond aesthetics about the corner-adjacent home on Monroe that was walking distance to various trains, yoga studios, and buzzy Bed-Stuy haunts like Stonefruit Espresso + Kitchen, Clementine Bakery and Pilar Cuban Eatery and the now iconic Mixtape cafe.

While Elbaz delicately restored the front facade, this labor of love (now known as House114) began in earnest after he gutted the interiors and dismantled the back facade of the house. Not only did these new additions and excavation allow the architect to significantly increase the square footage, it gave him the opportunity to add seven outdoor green spaces and an additional duplex unit at the garden level, which is flooded with southern sunlight thanks to a multi-story lightwell whose clean geometry resembles one of Donald Judd’s famous concrete blocks.

“To maintain the relationship with nature, we perforated the lower additions with lightwells, skylights and windows. The lower you go, the more it gets punctured to

allow the sun to come in,” explains Elbaz. “In a sense, the whole rear lower facade is opened to the outdoors. We wanted the smallest footprint — environmentally, architecturally, physically — with the biggest result.”

Though this airy addition to the main house extends 25 feet into the backyard, it hovers above the ground and cellar unit, giving both units a luminous entrance into the zen-like backyard garden, which is anchored by a century-old mulberry tree.

“We repurposed everything we could,” says Elbaz — the fireplaces, old beams, the bricks — to maintain as much of the original feel as possible while inserting a new life into the structure.” Pennsylvania bluestone was used to create garden pavers connecting the house and the garden, which is surrounded by responsibly sourced Ipe wood and bamboo privacy fences and ended by the vine-covered back wall of a local church.

“This house is about modesty, but there are a lot of architectural details at every turn,” says Elbaz. “The new interior walls are floating and there are no baseboards as a means of detaching the new from the old. As I like to say, this house is meant to contemplate the past, celebrate the present, and inform the future.”

In the foyer, he incorporated charcoal black and off white Venetian tile, which leads onto a pickled white ash flooring throughout the house. All of the flooring, casement work and metal structure (I-beams, staircase) in House114 were washed with mineral oil and finished with beeswax. Elbaz also stripped the original hearth to the bare wood and then bleached it with mineral oils. This arguably takes away some of the beauty, but it brings the materials closer to their point of origin.

After adding a third floor for the childrens’ quarters, Elbaz discovered the roof had an entirely open vista onto the Manhattan skyline, and added a green roof deck garden above it. While the addition is one story higher than many of the rest of the townhouses in the neighborhood, it is set back from the edge of the facade and clad in blackened plant-based, recyclable Resista boards — also used on the decking in back — so it blends in with the neighborhood.

“At the end of the day we wanted to give back with House114,” says Elbaz. With that ethos in mind, he imported an efficient green roof system from Canada that retains

rain water and releases it back into the garden. The system preserves so much energy that heating and cooling is only needed at the peaks of the seasons.

“It’s truly incredible,” remarks Elbaz, noting these new microclimates and ecosystems regularly attract birds and butterflies to the backyard garden. “It launches a conscious conversation in the community. Most people walk in and say, ‘This is very embracing.’”

“The house is socially and environmentally conscious,” says Elbaz. “If you can live in nature within the city — with constant sun, birds and butterflies, herb gardens and green spaces — you can grow as a person. This house is really about wellness. It’s changed our lives for the better.”

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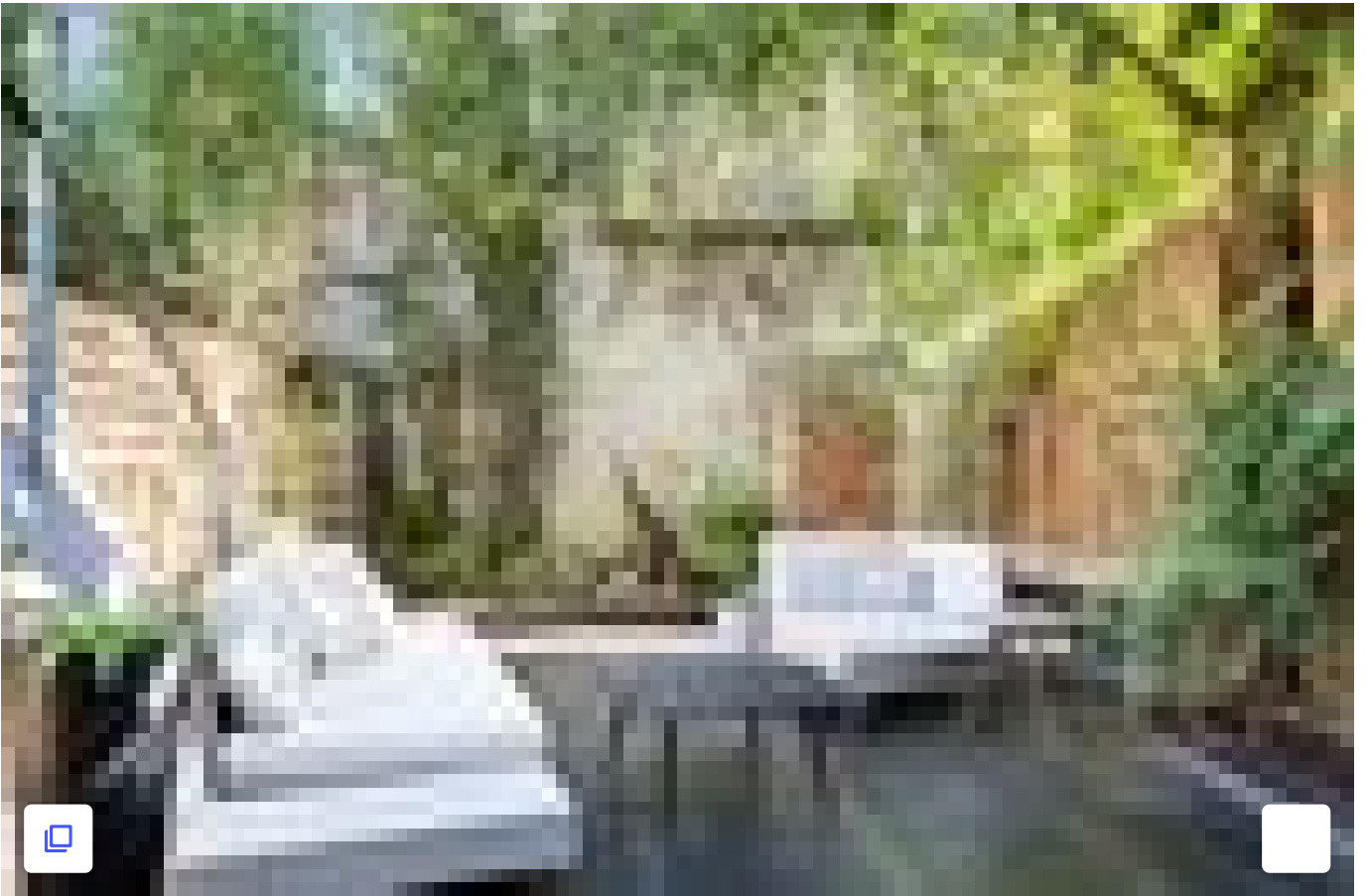














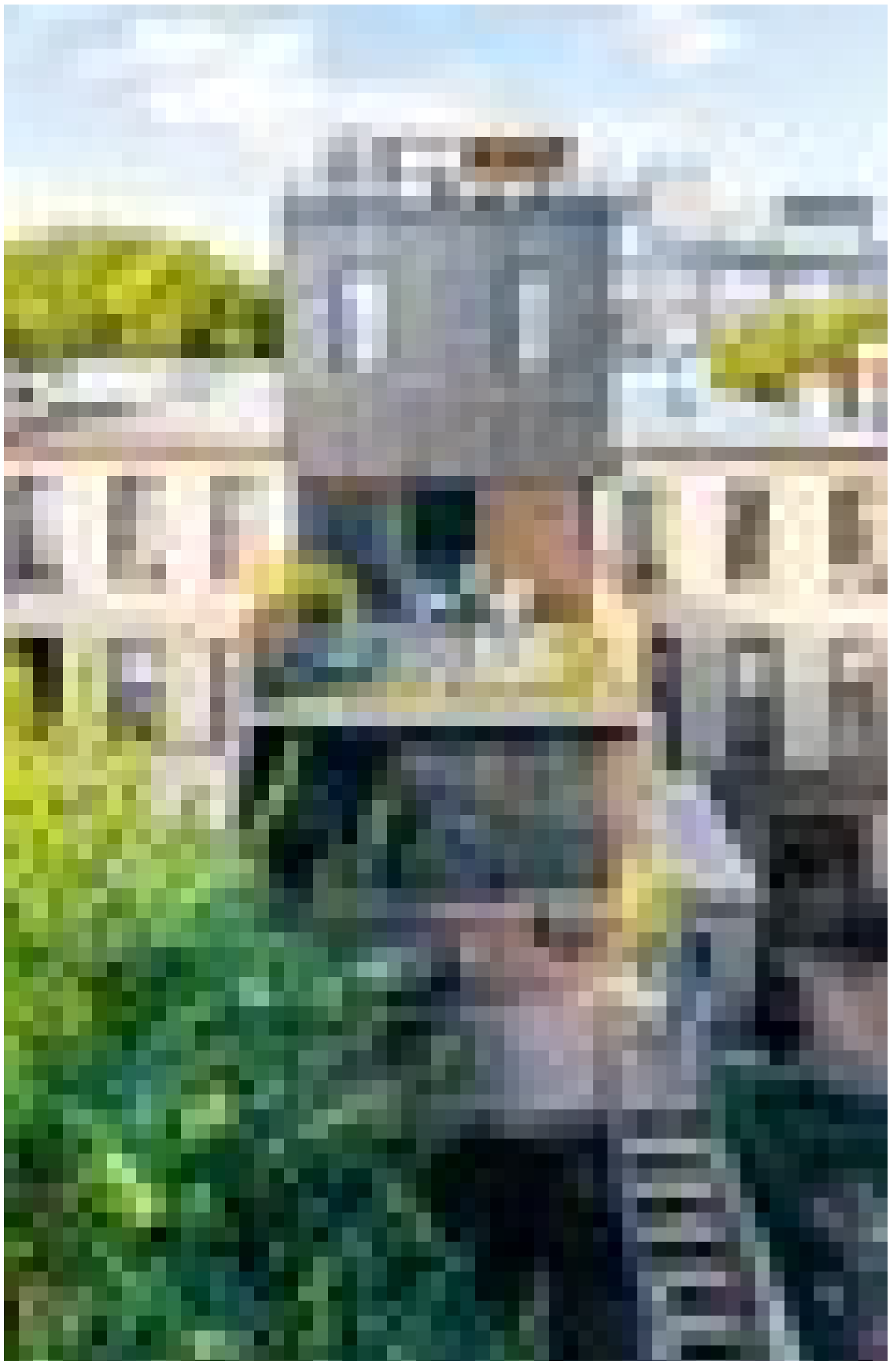


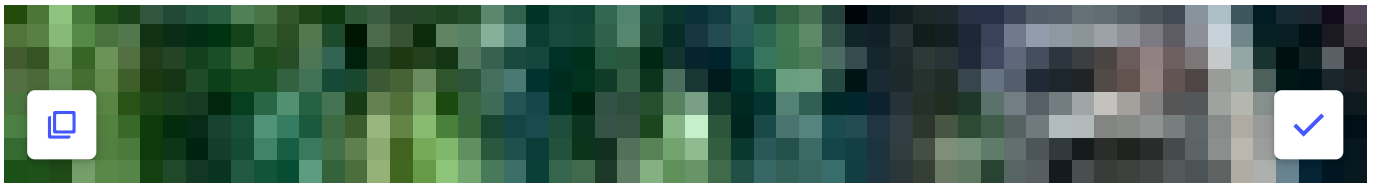












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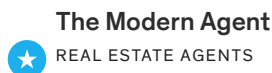
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