

practice

GIVE THEM SHELTER

For pioneering affordable-housing advocate Rosanne Haggerty, good design is hardly an extravagance. In fact, it pays for itself.

By Ann Hultman

"Something very profound seems to happen to people when they live in a building that's historic and beautiful," says Rosanne Haggerty, founder and president of Common Ground Community, a New York City-based nonprofit housing and community development organization. Haggerty won a prize in the power of good design—not only in historic structures, but in forward-looking contemporary architecture as well—to uplift and inspire residents. Started in 1992 with the restoration and transformation of the dilapidated Times Square Hotel into tiny units for low-income and formerly homeless individuals, Common Ground has since used 1,200 models in sites throughout the city, and has become a leading proponent of affordable housing that integrates design with social services and high-quality design.

Not only does design improve tenants' quality of life, asserts Haggerty, but it pays. Part of the funding for projects like the Times Square Hotel, for which Common Ground secured historic landmark status, comes from federal historic preservation tax credits. Other financing comes from low-income tax credits, rental assistance programs, other government sources, or on a sliding scale according to income—used a combination of low-income rent and city, state, and private grants. In this way, the net cost of running what Haggerty calls "affordable housing"—in effect, a humane and thoughtful reimagining of the program—can be as low as \$100 a month with on-site services such as childcare and job counseling—less than that of running a typical shelter or rehabilitation facility. And unlike state and local housing agencies, whose flexibility is inhibited by the many regulations that come with public housing, grants to Common Ground, by combining funds from various sources, make the ability to experiment with innovative models of housing.

Haggerty is now exploring the feasibility of expansion with Common Ground for an ambitious new project, a model called "first step housing" that will serve individuals who are not ready for permanent living arrangements. It will be the largest-scale reuse of the now-shrinking number of notorious "hiding houses," or flop houses, that once lined Manhattan's Bowery, where men could sleep on porches or in tiny units for a few dollars per night. Years of ongoing compact-dwelling urban research that took Haggerty from the streets of New York City to the remote backwoods of Appalachia led to the First Step Housing international design competition last year. "A Step Up for Small Spaces," page 32 (competed by Common Ground and The Architectural League of New York and led by architect Michael Ball, who won the housing studio at Columbia University's architecture school).

The competition resulted in two renovation or interior redesign projects for the Andrew—one of the few still-operating lodging houses on the Bowery, which Common Ground purchased in 2002—the



Common Ground founder Rosanne Haggerty stands in the lobby level below the Pine Barren, a soon-to-be Manhattan hotel built in 1912 that she developed as a tiny men's housing shelter in the 1990s. In 1996, Common Ground purchased the building and converted it into a residential complex. Haggerty is pictured in the former group housing, a reimagined landmark containing 416 efficiency apartments for low-income residents.

would be "comfortable, efficient, dignified, and inspiring," says Haggerty. A total of 180 submissions from around the world were received, and the winners were chosen by technical jury—local city planners, code inspectors, and cost estimators, as well as a tenant from the Andrew and the current building superintendent—led by a design jury made up of Haggerty, Ball, Common Ground staff architect Madeline Mack, and architects Ian Holm, Steven Hill, Julia Eisenberg, and Andrew Tse of Arcus (University of California).

Major design challenges, says Ball, were the project cost and the unusually narrow footprint of the building (22 feet wide by 120 feet long). In addition, the codes mandate that the partitions for the sleeping units be treated as fireplaces and not extend to the ceiling. Preserving themes among the entries, Ball reports, were mass production and participation to lower costs and afford easy replicability by other sites. To maximize space and natural light in the building's narrow corridor, some of the competition designs employed translucent partitions and sliding doors, though some looked back on the entry entries included concerns for privacy and being a viable emergency egress. Currently, the preliminary design is undergoing further development, and by the end of September, Common Ground will decide which sites can move forward into projects. Fabrication and installation will begin in 2005, when work on the shell of the Andrew, by Richard Vitis of New York City's Calderon Cooper and Vitis Architects, is complete.

32 | enr

practice

AN END FROM THE GROUND UP

Forging ahead into other realms of design, Common Ground is developing its first ground-up construction, a 200-unit building in downtown Brooklyn designed by firm partners Susan Rodig and Timothy Sherry of Pollock Partners. The project is a joint venture between Common Ground and the Action Fund of America, for whom Common Ground already manages a low-income residence for non-profit professionals in Manhattan. Like the Times Square Hotel, the Brooklyn building will house a mix of fifty units for formerly homeless people and low-income tenants, many of whom, in this case, are employed in the area and entertainment industries.

The land for the project, part of a parcel being developed by Harlan Ventures and Time Equities, was given to Common Ground by the developers because, as a city-designated urban-renewal site, a portion of the property had to be dedicated to low-income housing. The rest of the site will contain market-rate residential and commercial buildings. Common Ground chose Pollock Partners in part because of the firm's previous experience on projects like The Ed Sullivan Theater in Manhattan that also faced this site's peculiar challenge: close proximity to a subway tunnel. In some cases, the structure sat at only 5 inches above the main passage. Four 24-inch

trusses, which are engaged at the first two stories, support the building over the tunnel and visually "cut the presence of the building apart" from traditional low-income projects. "Having balconies, 'Part of Common Ground's mission with this project,'" he adds, "is to establish 'grids of place.' Incorporating sustainable initiatives is another goal of the project; the architect's an ongoing LEED guidelines (and may apply for the certification, if funding allows) and are pursuing the use of green roofs, daylighting—the front of the building is nearly glass—and recycled materials. Construction starts next year, and completion is planned for 2007.

Beyond communicating its ideology through architectural expression locally, Common Ground is spreading its innovative thinking about homelessness to cities across the United States and around the world in addition to partnering with local organizations on projects in London, New York, and Hartford and Westport, Connecticut, the nonprofit runs a "rehabilitation" program that educates housing organizations in countries as far away as Australia and Japan. With the First Step Housing competition, Haggerty hopes to also inspire other humane approaches to temporary shelter. "With her imaginative and pragmatic approach to affordable housing, she stands a very good chance."

enr | 31

A STEP UP FOR SMALL SPACES



Common Ground's First Step Housing competition challenged designers to re- envision the interior configuration for a men's lodging house on Manhattan's Bowery. Out of 180 international entries, five winning proposals were selected for further development. "Opening of 'Space' (left) is a design by architect Chang and partner Gabriel of New York City residents, defines their spaces by the way they display their objects on shelves along the walls. Particles are translucent so that natural light may filter into the building's narrow corridors. "Revised" (right) by Harvard Business School students David Givens, Brett Lee, and Sam McElroy, features modular and highly customizable units that fold up completely when not in use to create common spaces. "New York City Street" (middle) by "Common" Architects, Inc., employs wood panels, in a modular, to permit design to evolve. The units can be used to customize dwelling units. "High Rise" (below center), by Memphis's Markilian Design of Vancouver, is the most unusual proposal, with partitions made of a transparent paper structure that expands and contracts. The architecture, to modify the shape and size of units. This entry earned a special \$10k prize originally there were to be four winners for its sensitive approach, with the understanding that it would have to be developed in address issues such as disability and fire safety.



enr | 31

Give Them Shelter, Common ground's First Step competition challenged designers to re- envision the interior configuration for a men's lodging house on Manhattan's Bowery. A third New York city team, Lifeform submitted "Kit of Parts", in which swinging storage shelves can be used to customize dwelling units.

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