

## Micro Digs' Sliding TV, Murphy Bed Tempt Singles: Review

By James S. Russell - Jan 29, 2013 12:26 PM ET

Here's a startling fact: About 33 percent of New Yorkers live alone. So why doesn't the housing market cater to them?

One reason: Right now, the smallest legal studio permitted by New York housing regulations is 400 square feet.



"LaunchPad," a mockup of a micro-apartment at the Museum of the City of New York. It was designed by Amie Gross with built-in furniture that makes the small space more versatile, like the couch at left that comes apart to allow a Murphy wall bed to be pulled down. Source: John Halpern/Museum of the City of New York via Bloomberg



A computer visualization of the erection of the micro-apartment development. Each apartment will be prefabricated in a factory in Brooklyn, then craned into place almost fully finished. The process is intended to improve construction quality and save money. Source: nARCHITECTS /Museum of the City of New York via Bloomberg

"Making Room: New Models for Housing New Yorkers" displays provocative ways the city can adapt itself to changing demographics and behavior. (In Washington and San Francisco, the number of singles is even higher.)

These are not places for pack rats, as the show at the Museum of the City of New York makes amusingly, abundantly clear.

The humble Murphy bed, once a floozy's fallback, stages a high-style reappearance in a mockup of a "micro-apartment." A nicely finished wall panel conceals a bed that pivots to the floor with little effort.

In the 300-square-foot mockup designed by New York architect Amie Gross, a table on wheels stores beneath a kitchen counter. Beneath the table is a cart that holds plates and bowls. A flat-screen TV slides along a rail attached to built-in shelves.

### Suave Italians

The suave, Italian built-ins, designed by Clei Srl and sold by a company called Resource Furniture, are expensive, which is why you don't see them in a



Eric Bunge, a principal in nARCHITECTS, and Nicholas Lembo of Monadnock Development, at "Making Room: New Models for Housing New Yorkers" at the Museum of the City of New York. They will build New York's first micro-apartment development. Photographer: James S. Russell/Bloomberg

micro-apartment development that will test the concept.

New York's Department of Housing Preservation and Development held a design competition, cutely called "adAPT."

If the micro-apartment concept flies, the city may waive some rules to encourage builders to make more of them. (Michael R. Bloomberg, the mayor of New York and founder of Bloomberg LP, is promoting the micro-apartment effort as a way to lower housing costs. He announced the winning team at the museum.)

The winning team consisted of Monadnock Development LLC, Actors Fund Housing Development Corp. and Brooklyn-based nARCHITECTS.

Eric Bunge and Mimi Hoang, partners in nARCHITECTS, designed apartments as small as 250 square feet that focus on budget more than style. The 55 units will be built of brick-faced prefabricated steel modules and erected to 10 stories on East 27th Street.

The kitchen and bath are large enough to accommodate wheelchairs. The tiny living/sleeping zone has a 9-foot-wide sliding door that opens to a glass railing in an arrangement called a Juliet balcony -- a terrace on the cheap.

## **Communal Dens**

Rents will be as low as \$940 a month for tenants who meet income restrictions. The developer says the top market rates should fall below the \$2,400 monthly minimum average for studios in new construction.

The winning design and several finalists are regrettably displayed only on computer monitors in the exhibition.

Shared areas grow as private space shrinks. With lockers and bike storage comes a skylit fitness room and a sociable lobby parlor. Little communal dens are provided on each floor. An eighth-floor party room leads to a roof deck and community garden. Such amenities are advertised though rarely used in high- end buildings. They strike me as an essential antidote to claustrophobia in a pod building.

## **Adult Playground**

One finalist team, HWKN Architects with James McCullar Architecture, created an adult playground with bar, hot tub, climbing wall and communal dining room on a rooftop of crystalline shapes planted with vines.

I fear micro-apartments could become grim, overpriced boxes crammed into dim blocks -- as today's studios often are. Thankfully, "Making Room," working with the think tank Citizens Housing and Planning Council, displays alternatives to the city's worst housing abuses. We have all read too many stories about illegally subdivided family houses that end up turning into fire traps for their poor inhabitants.

Architect Deborah Gans cleverly shows a prototype that adds little wings to the kind of house that slumlords like to cut up. She calls them barnacles, but they open basements and attics to light and air.

Housing specialist Jonathan Kirschenfeld shows how apartments that flex according to working needs or family changes can transform empty lots along the Grand Concourse in the Bronx into amenable courtyard buildings.

"Making Room" is on view through Sept. 15 at the Museum of the City of New York, 1220 Fifth Ave. Information: +1-212- 534-1672; <http://www.mcny.org>. To see a slideshow of the micro apartments, [click here](#).

(James S. Russell writes on architecture for Muse, the arts and culture section of Bloomberg News. He is the author of "The Agile City." The opinions expressed are his own.)

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