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Ins and Outs of Getting Everything In

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NYC Mayor's Office

Rendering of a micro-unit interior.

New Yorkers have plenty of experience making the most out of the least when it comes to living space. A new exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York shows they aren't the only ones trying to create big out of small.

The exhibit, which opens Wednesday, offers an array of architectural blueprints, models and videos showing how developers and architects from around the world are trying to put city space to better use. The designs include so-called micro units, apartments built for shared housing and modified homes for extended families, with examples from Hong Kong, Tokyo and San Francisco.

Those cities and others with large single populations have beaten New York to the micro-unit punch by greenlighting compact, nontraditional living spaces. Now New York is making a micro move with its adAPT NYC competition for studio designs for one or two people within the confines of 250-370 square feet, compared with the city's normal minimum of 400 square feet.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg on Tuesday announced the contest winner, called "My Micro NY," at a preview for the new exhibit, "Making Room: New Models for Housing New Yorkers."



Mark Abramson for The Wall Street Journal

Mayor Michael Bloomberg examines a micro-apartment layout.

The centerpiece of the museum exhibit wasn't the competition winner but instead a full-size, 325-square-foot L-shaped studio designed by the New York City-based firm Amie Gross Architects.

The micro unit takes advantage of every inch of space, with sliding doors, foldaway furniture and built-in storage units. The design allows for distinct places for cooking, eating and sleeping, which, Ms. Gross said, "is the absolute

most critical thing about designing such a small space. You don't want to feel like you're sleeping in the kitchen."

Ms. Gross divulged another architectural trick she used for making the space feel bigger: "The ceiling in the living area is about a foot higher than the ceiling in the entryway. That instantly makes it feel more spacious," she said.

Donald Albrecht, the curator of the "Making Room" exhibit, said he had several goals for the show, which is presented in conjunction with the Citizens Housing & Planning Council.

"First, I want people to realize that the Museum of the City of New York is not just about the history of the city—it is also about the future," he said. "The architects and developers featured here are responding to social change, but we want people to see that they can affect change, too."