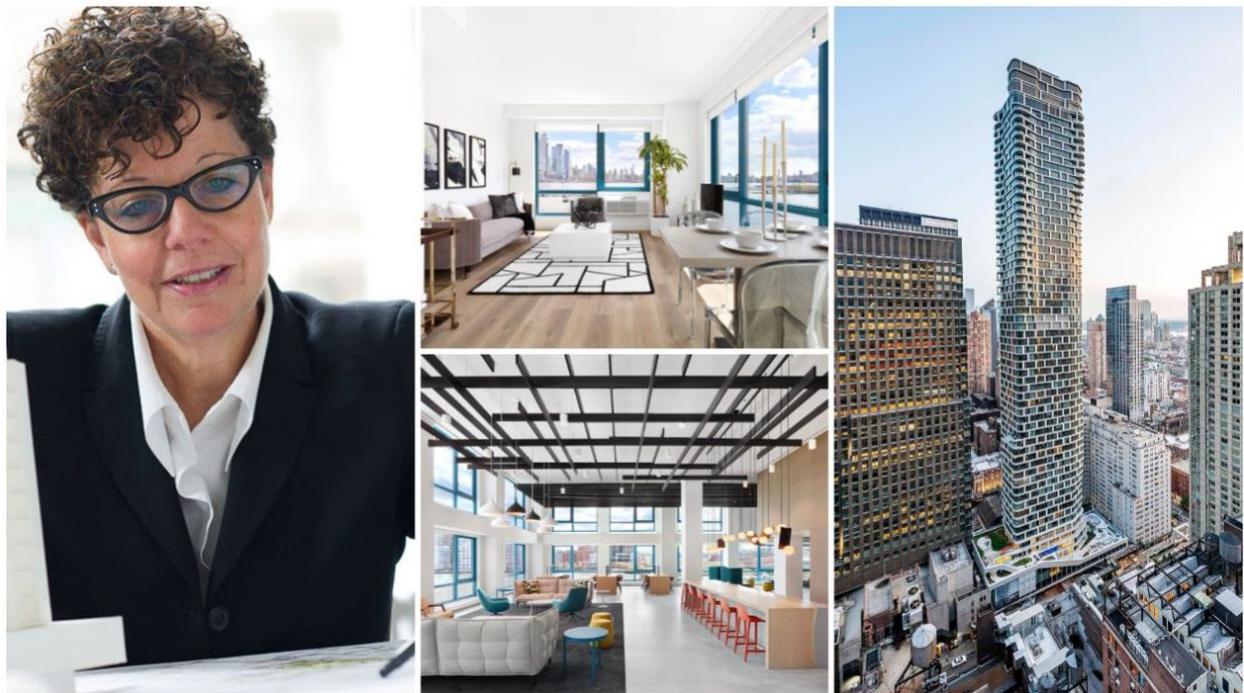


MANSION GLOBAL

Flex Spaces, Informal Rooms More Popular Than Ever, Says NYC Architect

CetraRuddy's Nancy Ruddy talks dream homes, the beauty of adaptive reuse and more

BY LUCY COHEN BLATTER | ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON MAY 11, 2020



Ms. Ruddy with her recent projects: Hamilton Cove (interior), a rental residences in Weehawken, New Jersey; ARO (exterior), a luxury rental tower in Manhattan's Midtown West neighborhood.
COMPOSITE: CETRARUDDY; COURTESY OF NANCY RUDDY

New York City Architect Nancy Ruddy—and her husband and business partner John Cetra—started the CetraRuddy global design firm in 1987. The guiding principle, they said, was that architecture should “engage the urban fabric while enriching the human spirit.”

Among their biggest projects are the soaring One Madison tower and the Tribeca celebrity hot spot that is 443 Greenwich Street. They've also designed 67 Livingston Street, a Silverback Development project in Brooklyn Heights, in the borough they call home.

Among their most recent projects is Hamilton Cove—a three-tower collection of 573 luxury rental residences along the Lincoln Harbor waterfront in Weehawken, New Jersey.

We caught up with Ms. Ruddy to discuss changing buyer and developer tastes, how to make a house a home, and more.

Mansion Global: How are things for your firm? Have projects been paused?

Nancy Ruddy: We have 100 people, typically working on 23 or so projects at a time. We're really focused on keeping our team motivated, inspired and passionate. We're trying to keep that community that we typically have in the office. We've all had to adapt in making presentations digitally. Usually, there's the touching and feeling of materials. We had some experience with doing presentations remotely, since we do international projects, but our work is very tactile, so sometimes, now, we send trays of samples.

We live in Brooklyn, in Park Slope, and every morning we take a walk through the park. We have a building we can see that's going up where the curtain wall came from Italy, so the timeline slowed.

We've only had one project slow down and one stop. We've been lucky. In New York, we had construction stop, but we're busy working with clients who are appealing for special reasons. For example, in one building half an exterior wall is already in place, and our client is concerned that water will get in and cause a problem. The city is open to hearing these things.

People are most concerned about new projects, projects that haven't started yet, and they likely will not start right away.

MG: How do you expect client tastes to change as a result of Covid-19?

NR: We'll need to create more flex spaces. We've been incorporating flex spaces or home offices for a while now. They can be as small as 7-foot-by-7-foot. We have a new project, called Rose Hill, on East 29th Street, and we created flex spaces attached to the living room, with glass sliding doors.

And kitchens are not just for cooking anymore. We've been designing little desk areas where you can work but still be part of the action for a while. It's about finding a place, maybe it's a nook in your bedroom, where you can work and feel comfortable. That said, it's helpful if you can pack up your stuff at the end of the day, and put your work away. You want to differentiate between work and play.

Neutral, natural materials that are sustainable create warmth and intimacy. You want a tranquil background that creates calm and then you want to accent it with accessories.

MG: Do you expect more people to flock outside the city?

NR: We've been seeing developer clients who would once only develop in Manhattan moving to the outer boroughs and then on to develop in Westchester and Long Island.

There is a sense that people wanted to spend more time in their homes. And the projects are really sophisticated. It's that urban quality that people love about the city, but in the outer ring where people can get more space.

After 9/11 and after 2009, there were people who wanted to be in a less- dense area, and I imagine we'll see more of that now.

MG: How would you describe your dream home?

NR: We live in a brownstone from 1897 right near Prospect Park. And we have a house in Rhinebeck that we've owned for 30 years. I feel like my house in the country is my dream home. We have a tiny Adirondack cottage that's under 1,700 square feet on 35 acres on a lake. I cherish nature and being able to have an indoor-outdoor connection.

Views are amazing—either park or city. I love being around water, to swim in and to boat in. And I love an inspiring historic property. That's my house upstate, except it's so tiny. I love to entertain and cook, and I have 27 people for Thanksgiving every year. We've had weddings and parties, but I have the tiniest little kitchen.

That's my dream, a place with views and water that's humble, and is filled with things we've collected from travels, pictures of those we love.

We've been trying to do an extension for 25 years, but when we get to the country, we collapse and don't want to think about it.

MG: What's your favorite part of your home?

NR: In the country, it's my 35-acre backyard. The lawn looks out over a lake and we see the most beautiful sunsets.

In my dining room in my brownstone, we have a fireplace and it looks out over the backyard. I sit there on Saturday morning and I write; it's a very peaceful place.

MG: How do you create a feeling of "luxury" in real estate?

NR: We did a project, 443 Greenwich, which was an old warehouse that was converted into condos. We're often asked the question of why it was so successful. It doesn't have a view and doesn't have particularly high ceilings. But we developed a parking garage that you drive into, and you can go from a private lobby straight up to your apartment. I think privacy is what people want. There are so many sophisticated people who care about design but don't want miles and miles of marble or flash. No more gold faucets.

We're doing a brownstone on 72nd Street with all these formal rooms, and the owners want us to change it around. People want comfort and informality.

MG: What's the most valuable thing in your home?

NR: I have artwork on the wall that my daughter did, and family photos. That's what's important to create a home.

When we travel, we do it to experience other cultures and to learn how people live, and many times I come back with things I really love.

We're doing two schools in India, so we've traveled there 12 to 15 times in the last two years. I found a tiny toy that's 150 years old. It's a simple piece of wood, with wheels, and a little bit of paint. It has the hand marks of generations of children. That is one of my most valuable possessions.

I was an art historian before I became an architect, so we have a lot of art. I have an Edward Hopper lithograph which I found in an antique store. It's called "The Sewer" and shows a woman doing her work, looking out the window. I bought it for less than \$300. There's a contemplative nature of it. It's on my creaky staircase, and I look at it multiple times a day.

MG: If you could live in a brand-new development or a prime resale property, which would you choose and why?

NR: I'm a modernist but I have eclectic taste. I'd ideally like a historic property that's been reimagined for modern living. For me, that older craftsmanship is intriguing. But when I look at the newer buildings, I see the services that are there. The technology is amazing, kitchen and bathrooms are for today's living style.

Adaptive reuse projects are my favorite. We're doing 393 West End Avenue, a beautiful pre-war building. We're keeping the bones and adding modernism as far as how we live today.