

The New York Times

September 13, 2020

RIGHT AT HOME

One-Room Schoolhouse With a View

Luxury apartment complexes are offering common spaces for at-home learning pods.

By RONDA KAYSEN

Vanessa Phillips was sold on a two-bedroom apartment at One Hundred Barclay, a luxury condo conversion in TriBeCa, because of the enviable amenity space she saw when she visited the building in February. The Ralph Walker-designed Art Deco tower has two landscaped terraces, a media room, music rooms, a wine lounge, a billiards room and a fitness center with two pools, all of which were closed during the pandemic but are now in the process of reopening.

But even with the fitness center and boxing studio available again, Ms. Phillips, 38, finds that she is most appreciative of the roof deck, where her 7-year-old son, Finn, has been able to spread out with other children in the social pods that she has set up for him. Ms. Phillips moved from Williamsburg, Brooklyn, to TriBeCa in July, and has spent the summer connecting with other families in the neighborhood and the building, looking for children interested in joining board-game sessions at the roof deck's long tables.

The first gathering happened in early September. She is now working on setting up a learning pod for five to seven children, with plans to hire a tutor once the school year starts at P.S. 234. When the weather cools, she hopes the children will be able to study in an indoor lounge, providing it is open. "The school day will be in a lounge in the building," she said. So far, building management has been amenable to her vision.

"This whole experience with this pandemic has forced me to engage more and to really tap into every possible resource that I have," said Ms. Phillips, the chief executive of Feel Good Foods, which will be providing snacks for the children. "Because if you have it, use it."

One thing New Yorkers living in luxury apartments have is space — and they're using it.

While many city parents are scrambling to squeeze desks into tiny apartments so their children can have a basic work space, parents at luxury buildings are eyeing playrooms, roof decks and music rooms as potential back-to-school classroom spaces. With the city now in Phase 4 of its reopening plan, more of these spaces have opened their doors again, some in a limited capacity. And some buildings are stepping in to help, teaming up with local arts, sports and education organizations to offer exclusive programming to keep children occupied during the school day and well into the af-



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ternoon. Others are setting aside resident lounges where learning pods can gather.

The sheer volume of amenities at these buildings — like indoor soccer fields, rock-climbing walls and private screening rooms — could give these families an entirely different back-to-home-school experience from that of the rest of the city. At a time when most parents are struggling to figure out how their children will make it through a largely unsupervised school year, children in these buildings can participate in curated activities designed to keep them occupied and engaged. So as the weather cools and the school year starts, many of these families will be able to insulate themselves from the pain of the pandemic.

Quay Tower, a condo in Brooklyn Heights, turned one of its rooftop lounges into a classroom. One Hundred Barclay may let residents use vacant apartments as space

Students will make pickles in the park, then move indoors as the weather cools.

for learning pods. And 30 Warren, a TriBeCa condo, had already teamed up with the Church Street School for Music and Art when it opened to residents this month. Condo residents get discounts on the school's in-person and virtual programming, including a day care program where, for \$120 a day, children can be supervised when school is virtual.

"The sentiment is, 'My kids need to get out, I need to get out, what can we do?'" said Kelly Sullivan, the lifestyle director of Waterline Square, a three-tower rental and condo development on Riverside Boulevard between 59th and 61st Streets.

The complex has a whopping 100,000 square feet of shared amenity space, with indoor swimming pools, basketball and squash courts, an indoor soccer field and skate park, and a music studio. Only the pools and children's play room remain

closed at this point.

While the indoor spaces were closed during the summer, Ms. Sullivan focused on the complex's 2.6-acre park for setting up socially distant activities outdoors open to residents and the public, like sunset yoga and cardio kickboxing. With the school year starting, Ms. Sullivan is lining up an activities schedule for the school-age crowd.

Among the activities planned exclusively for residents is a series of classes for children run by Green Food Solutions, an urban farming company. Participants will sit at tables in the park beneath tents and heating lamps and learn to make pickles, cultivate mushrooms, carve pumpkins and make cranberry preserves. Once winter sets in, Ms. Sullivan hopes to be able to make better use of the indoor spaces. "I think it's going to be a long winter," she said.

At Quay Tower, after parents requested space for small group learning, management decided to set aside a 1,100-square-foot rooftop lounge and turn it into something of a one-room schoolhouse. If it turns out families need more space, children could also work in a second rooftop lounge, or take over part of the 1,500-square-foot children's playroom, a music practice room or even part of the lobby. "As we move into the cooler weather, we can offer more space as needed," said Vince Cangelosi, the director of development for RAL Companies, the developer of Quay Tower.

Not every building, though, is so eager to turn its spaces into de facto schoolhouses. The developer of One Hundred Barclay, where Ms. Phillips lives, has taken a more hands-off approach to the situation. While management has been working with Ms. Phillips to accommodate her requests, it hasn't decided to preemptively offer residents programs or set aside rooms for learning, and plans to approve requests on a case-by-case basis once the indoor lounges reopen within the next two weeks.

"I'm not creating an early-childhood education center," said Jordan Brill, a partner at Magnum Real Estate Group, which developed One Hundred Barclay with CIM Group. "I'm more than willing to support and encourage these activities, but this is a condo, and I'm not an authority on education and educational programs."

Mr. Brill expressed concern about liability, particularly for any pod that includes children who don't live in the building. He also worried about balancing the needs of parents and residents who don't have school-age children and may want to use the space for other purposes. "We're not turning One Hundred Barclay into a school," he said.

And yet, school may happen there anyway.