

West End Square 50 | Washington, D.C. | TEN Arquitectos

Triple Play

With affordable housing, a squash club, and a fire station, a building animates a prominent West End corner.

BY DEANE MADSEN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALAN KARCHMER



The stretch of Washington, D.C.'s M Street between 21st Street and Rock Creek Park—otherwise known as the West End—boasts enough highbrow hotels and restaurants that the neighborhood seems a perfect fit for a squash club; what's surprising is that the club, as the middle part of a three-tiered cake by TEN

Arquitectos, is layered between a fire station and six floors of affordable housing.

The project, called West End Square 50 in reference to its lot's appellation within the planning department, replaces an aging two-story fire station with a brand-new one. But it also injects palpable activity into an inward-facing neighborhood as part of a public-private partnership between the city and developer Eastbanc while making the most of a previously underutilized site. Eastbanc won the bid to redevelop this lot and nearby Square 37 in large part due to its solution for the replacement of municipal facilities and inclusion of affordable housing.

Marketing lingo for Square 50 is "squash on fire," which is a literal description of the program: the double-height street-level fire station is capped with a squash club featuring a bar and restaurant. And then there are the 55 units of affordable housing in the six stories above the squash club.

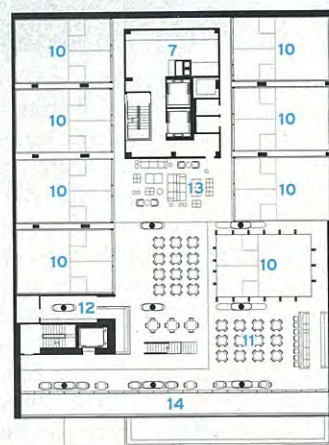
The tripartite configuration is the expression of the different uses. "It is a superposition of three separate buildings that all respond quite literally to the demands on them," explains Enrique Norten, founder of New York- and Mexico City-based TEN Arquitectos. "The articulation of the space,

SQUASH SANDWICH Square 50 layers a fire station, a squash club, and 55 units of affordable housing. Along the primary facade on M Street, the station serves as a vibrant podium. With its doors open (left), the facility showcases emergency vehicles. With the doors closed (above), it provides an uninterrupted band of fire engine red.





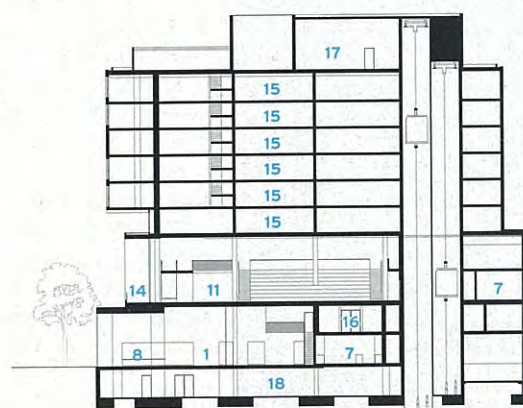
GROUND-FLOOR PLAN



THIRD-FLOOR PLAN



SIXTH-FLOOR



SECTION A - A

- 9 CONFERENCE ROOM
- 10 SQUASH COURTS
- 11 RESTAURANT
- 12 PRO SHOP
- 13 SITTING AREA
- 14 TERRACE
- 15 APARTMENTS
- 16 BUNK ROOM
- 17 MECHANICAL
- 18 PARKING

materiality, and coloration is different, but structure is the thread that weaves them together.” That structure—which ties the three portions via paired, poured-in-place, steeply angled columns that form V-shapes—is on prominent display, thanks to the double-height glazing of the squash club and restaurant. (Transfer girders within post-tensioned slabs redirect forces and allow ideal structural grid layouts for each of the uses on the floors above and below.)

Along Square 50’s primary facade on M Street, the club’s lobby and the firehouse serve as a vibrant podium at one of the West End’s tonier intersections. Perforated metal screens clad the firehouse, and its folding doors, when open, present the station’s emergency vehicles; when closed, they form an uninterrupted band of fire engine red. The station itself becomes an extension of the apparatus it houses, and uses, as Norton puts it, “reflective materiality that refers to the machinery and equipment.”

Above the station is the roughly 20,000-square-foot squash facility, which includes a bar and restaurant. A check-in desk and small pro shop greet players, who need not be members to book lessons or reserve time on one of the eight courts, two of which are glass-enclosed. Courts 1 and 8, situated closest to the entrance, are a vibrant blue, and their glass walls invite the gaze of lookers-on in the lounge area between them; live-streaming video from all of the courts feeds to monitors above a stacked plywood bar lit with floating disc pendants. A suspended central mezzanine allows views of the play from above. Exposed ductwork produce a scolding thud when errant balls fly above out-of-bounds lines. The pulse-pounding social activity spills outside on a south-facing open-air terrace overlooking M Street, where bar patrons and squash players can catch their breath, and take in the views down 23rd Street to the other TEN Arquitectos/Eastbanc collaboration on the block, the higher-end mixed-use development, Westlight, on the Square 37 parcel.

While the stacking of programmatic boxes may not be novel, it’s a welcome break from the monotony of unbroken glass expanses that toe the property lines of nearby K Street. And it does accurately encapsulate the mixed-use nature of the project, which is what allowed this project to see the light of day. The city swaps an outmoded facility for a brand-new one, with the added benefits of increased density and affordable housing in an area that is anything but: leases at the Ritz-Carlton Residences (one of Eastbanc’s earlier developments) across the street from Square 50 start at \$5,200 per month. Meanwhile, Square 50 includes a mix of 52 studios, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom apartments that are available to residents who earn 60 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI) and start at \$1,200 per month. Three units are designated for resi-



STRUCTURAL MUSCLE V-shaped columns are on display in the squash club (above). Transfer girders and post-tensioned slabs help redirect forces and allow column-grid layouts, ideal for the uses on the levels below and above, including the fourth floor, which has residential units that look out onto a green roof (right). The apartments on the five levels above are enclosed behind a more solid exterior wall assembly.





Stacking the Deck

The Westlight, or Square 37, plants itself firmly on the other end of the affordability spectrum from its sister Eastbanc project, Square 50. But, like that building, this market-rate project includes a public component. Here it is a 20,000-square-foot ground-level neighborhood library that replaces an outdated facility on the site; retail space lines the avenue leading to Square 50. On the nine floors above—supported by a poured-in-place concrete structure that includes columns that split into pairs or trios—rises an agglomeration of glass-enclosed modules. These house 71 luxury condominiums and 93 rental apartments in one-, two-, and three-bedroom configurations, staggered in a way that produces a facade of varying depth as well as corner conditions for each unit. A peculiarity in the zoning regulations allows for 4-foot cantilevers, which Norten has used to fullest advantage at one corner, where each aluminum-and-glass module protrudes farther than the one beneath it in two directions. At the opposite corner, the modules step back as they rise, producing a ziggurat-like effect. Some of units feature dramatically raked columns that trace these offsets and brace the cantilevers. “By using that exception to the code,” explains Norten, “we could create differentiation among the apartments.” DM

dents at or below 30 percent of AMI, and there are also six market-rate units.

Most of the residential portion of the building is enclosed within an exterior wall assembly of fiber-cement board with punched, sound-proof windows, thanks to noise-reduction considerations related to the ground-floor fire-house. Access to the apartments is through a lobby and elevator bay on the quieter 23rd Street side. And, once upstairs, double-loaded corridors lead to the units, which are, in a word, compact. One-bedroom apartments of roughly 700 square feet open into efficient kitchens-as-foyers, and two-bedroom apartments of about 840 square feet occupy the corner overlooking M Street; 530-square-foot studios bend around fire-stair and elevator cores. Durable finishes, such as laminate cabinets, and standard appliances are reminders of the affordable part of the equation. Still, the units are smartly designed: that’s part of developer Anthony Lanier’s conundrum, as he cites his responsibility to deliver first-class housing for city dwellers. “An affordable-housing project doesn’t have to be a lesser building than a market-rate building.” Looking at this project and the Westlight down the block, it’s clear that Square 50 in many ways surpasses the bar set by its market-rate neighbors while infusing a needed mix of uses and diversity into the West End. ■

Deane Madsen, Associate AIA, is a writer and architectural photographer based in Washington, D.C.

credits

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GENERAL CONTRACTOR:

Clark Construction

CLIENT: Eastbanc

SIZE: 89,000 square feet

COST: withheld

COMPLETION DATE: October 2017

SOURCES

METAL PANELS: Atlas International

GLASS: Vitro

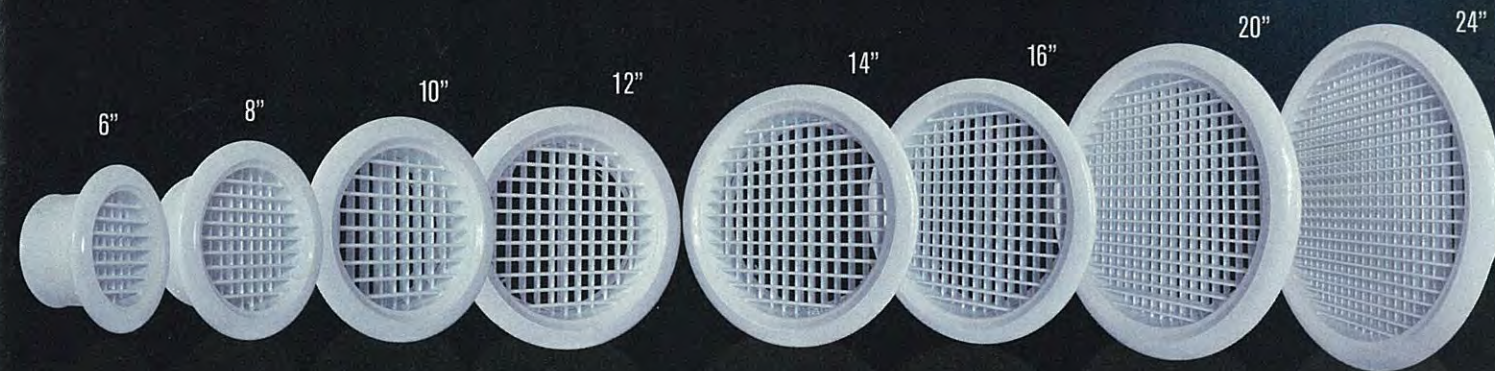
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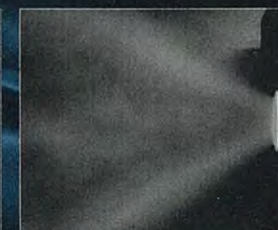


■ Mill Finish and Custom Colors Available

■ Airflow Patterns



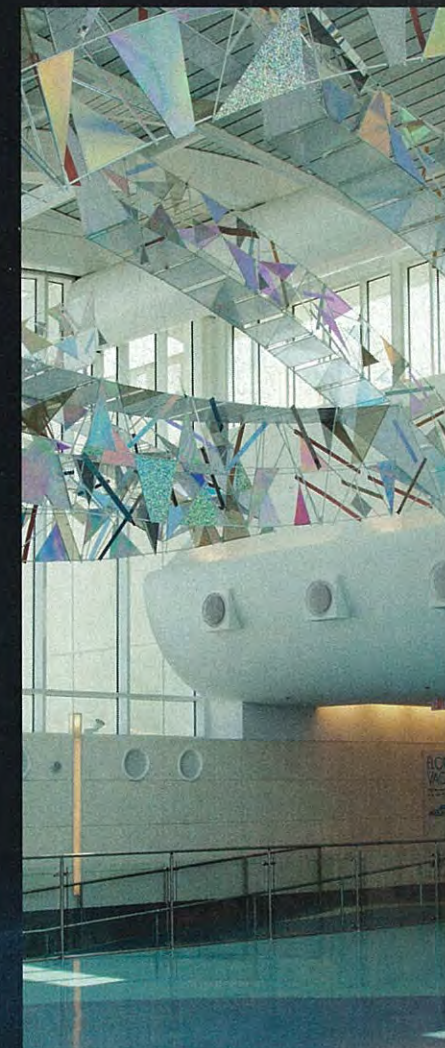
Straight Discharge Pattern



Wide Dispersion Pattern



45 Degree Discharge Pattern



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