

Bambi Versus Godzilla

On New York's Bond Street, two titans -- of architecture, development, and sexy street graffiti -- battle it out to determine whose style will be dominant. This is the tale of the tape.



Everyone knows that architects are always competing. Whose glasses are thicker? Whose haircut more asymmetrical? Whose discussion of intra-matrixed diasporic space-making conditions more incomprehensible?

What everyone doesn't know is that sometimes, if rarely, it's the buildings that compete.

Two new condo developments rose above Manhattan's Bond Street in the last year. One is by Deborah Berke, a minimalist architect loved by her peers and clients, and, increasingly, the public as well. The other is by Ian Schrager and Herzog & de Meuron, Swiss titans who made their name with the Tate Modern. Bond Street may seem like a quiet downtown enclave, but make no mistake, this street has turned into an architectural battleground, where Schrager's luxuriously nostalgic style clashes with Berke's proportioned, rigorous capital-A architecture approach. The fight has far-reaching implications, between the need for faux-vintage nostalgia (or rather, the need to ground something in the here and now to say that we're here, now) and a desire for abstracted shape, for spatial expression, for out-of-context beauty. It's a global battle that happens to have an epicenter on the same block, in two buildings that are practically right next to each other. There's a local favorite, and a proven champion. There's an underdog, and an old-timer. There's Berke's Bambi at 48 Bond, and there's

Schrager's Godzilla at 40 Bond. Let's see who wins.

48 Bond



40 Bond



Architect and Developer

Deborah Berke, Romy Goldman.

Ian Schrager, Herzog & de Meuron.

Location

North side of Bond St., off the Bowery.

North side of Bond St., between Bowery and Lafayette.

Opened to Public

"In the next couple months."

October 15, 2007.

Pedigree

Developer Romy Goldman of Gold Development and architect Deborah Berke. Girl power. Berke is an insiders'

Developer Ian Schrager and architect Herzog & de Meuron. Schrager brings his Studio 54 badass cred to the table -

pick, the architects' architect, known and loved in smaller circles for her throwback minimalism and crazy rigor. Biggest hits include a bank in that architectural sculpture park of a city, Columbus, Indiana; the Yale School of Art and New Theater in New Haven; and the Marianne Boesky Gallery (plus upstairs living quarters) in New York. In this good-old-boy world of Manhattan development, she's a BFD.

- oh, and then there's that little thing about how he's the godfather of the new hotel, the man behind Morgans Hotel Group which was behind the reinvention of hospitality design from a necessary boredom into cool places to just *chill* (this is the guy who brought then-wildchild Philippe Starck to the Royalton, remember) -- while the Swiss maximalists, famous for the Tate Modern in London and the de Young in San Francisco, make this condo architecturally legit.

Height

11 stories.

11 stories plus Schrager's apartment, a triplex penthouse that he claims will be "the biggest one-bedroom in New York."

Weight

17 units.

27 units, including five townhouses.

Façade



Deborah Berke's ultra-rigorous minimalist grey granite might seem out of street context, but the façade's big windows are just as rooted in the neighborhood's loft history as Herzog and de Meuron's front. The oversized scale of the grid make it visually accessible rather than overwhelming, and, given it's the same changing the scale in your eyes trick that that other big minimalist Philip Johnson liked to use, totally historical. And the proportions? Perfect.

Herzog & de Meuron's neighborhood-history-friendly re-interpretation of a typical Soho cast-iron loft building gives us a bubbly-green-glass-gridded front. It's shiny, it's poppy, it's referential. And from close-up it's soft and friendly (and, whee! green like a Coke bottle!) but from across the street the unending and sort of scale-less grid makes the building turn from cute and cuddly to menacingly Miesian.

Street Level

It's quiet, it's subtle, it's gray. Windows on one side of the entrance, wall on the other. If you didn't look up, you might not look to the side. Typical Berke in that the closer you get the more you see and the more you see the more you are amazed at her ridiculous mastery of proportion and scale. It's the kind of street level façade that sneaks up on you, quietly, all zinc and glass curtain wall, but it's a "just when you think you're out they pull you back in" kind of stealth. This is

It's loud, it's proud. Schrager --and let's ignore the whole gentrification irony here -- wanted the street level to be all about the neighborhood's arty past, so the architects cast a computer-rendered interpretation of graffiti into a series of five aluminum gates that physically protect the visually wide-open townhouses. Nice idea but the result is a little more Flintstones than Neckface -- although, before we completely give up, the unbelievable tactile attractiveness of

an entrance for people who are much more excited about what they're walking than what they're walking through.

the gates (just try not to think about scaling them) makes a walk past the building a party in your mind. The entrance itself is a party in your eyes, with its double-height graffiti-detailed ultra-shiny crazy-wavy aluminum. And the same, but in Corian, inside? Makes you want a condo real bad.

Interior

Minimalist, big windows, luxurious, Eileen Gray furniture.

Minimalist, big windows, luxurious, Le Corbusier furniture.

And the Winner Is...

48 Bond. In terms of units and floors and opening earlier, 40 Bond has an edge, but let's bear in mind the complete visual subjectivity of this competition. For straight-up architecture, we're calling it for 48 Bond. It's the Bambi in this fight, but it's a Bambi that's going somewhere. 40 Bond is shiny and flash, but it's stuck in reference and the past, in interpreting interpretations -- graffiti, cast iron, the age of the club -- while 48 Bond's design is more mature, dwelling on age-old questions of proportion and space and scale, all of which it answers, and perfectly. 48 Bond speaks far softly, but it's got a hell of a big stick.

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