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ART IN RESIDENCE: GARDEN'S EDGE BRINGS CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE TO GRAMERCY PARK'S SKY GARDEN PENTHOUSE

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At the meeting point of contemporary art and architecture, the **Solarium Penthouse (PHC) at 200E20TH** in New York's Gramercy Park sets the stage for **Garden's Edge**, an immersive exhibition conceived within the residence itself. Designed by **CetraRuddy**, the full-floor penthouse has been transformed into a living gallery,

framing works by three New York-based artists – **Alexandria Tarver**, **Chellis Baird**, and **Julia Whitney Barnes** – whose practices each engage with the city's natural and built environments.

Within this light-filled space overlooking Gramercy Park, Stuyvesant Square, and the Manhattan skyline, art and architecture coexist as extensions of one another. Botanical studies, sculptural textiles, and cyanotype prints unfold across the interiors, tracing the complex relationship between urban life and organic growth. The result is both an exhibition and an inhabitable landscape – a penthouse that blurs domesticity and display, permanence and change.

In this conversation, we speak with the artists and the curatorial team behind **Garden's Edge** about the ideas that shaped the project: how contemporary art can reimagine private space, how architecture can frame dialogue, and how the city itself becomes a collaborator in the creative process.



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In what ways does *Garden's Edge* reinterpret the role of the home – not just as a backdrop for art, but as an active curatorial space that invites emotional and intellectual engagement?

Jenny Mushkin Goldman, Managing Director, Arts & Culture

The inspiration for the exhibition came from the question of how we can bring Gramercy Park into the home. We wanted to capture the connection between nature and everyday life in bustling New York. The works themselves therefore ask you to slow down, ponder on flora and fauna, and remove you through sight and feel from the city's concrete and steel surroundings. To answer your question, yes, the home environment can include an engaging exhibition that provokes emotion and thought.



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How does the architectural narrative of the Sky Garden Penthouse – its light, geometry, and views – shape not only how the works are displayed, but how they are perceived and inhabited?

Ximena Rodriguez, Principal & Director of Interior Design at CetraRuddy

The Sky Garden Penthouse perfectly embodies the architectural narrative of 200 East 20th Street. We conceived of the building as a private oasis and a place of refuge that is modern and speaks to contemporary life, yet is also very connected to the historic context of the neighborhood and to Gramercy Park itself.

Light and views are an important part of the narrative, and the penthouse design reflects this in exciting ways – for instance in the incredible curved corner window in the Great Room, which references the distinctive bays of historic landmarks facing the Park. This setting, in the heart of Manhattan and with a geometry that emphasizes naturalistic curves, with views over the Gramercy Park treetops, and with multiple exposures that let you trace the sun's journey every day, is the perfect environment to consider and take in works of art that speak to this dialogue of nature and urban life.

The exhibition speaks to a contemporary longing for nature in hyper-urban contexts. Was this theme a response to the city's emotional climate, or does it signal a more permanent shift in how we define wellbeing in design?

Jenny Mushkin Goldman, Managing Director, Arts & Culture

The theme speaks to our collective need for home to be a refuge from the harshness of daily modern life in general but certainly more than ever. Bringing in aspects into the home that are evocative of gardens, thinking in particular about Gramercy Park, this theme responds to the current need for living greenery to be an antidote to contemporary stressors.



Nights
Image copyright: Courtesy of Alexandria Tarver



Nights
Image copyright: Courtesy of Alexandria Tarver

Ximena Rodriguez, Principal & Director of Interior Design at CetraRuddy

At CetraRuddy, we've always believed in the importance of bridging nature and the urban context. So much of New York City's magic lies in moments where the two meet, and the physical and emotional impact of that experience can be profound. The pandemic brought the value of nature and biophilia to the forefront, but I think people have recognized it intuitively for a long time, and 200 East 20th Street reflects the holistic way we define wellbeing through connections to the natural world.

This focus is apparent in the design of the building itself, with a facade whose organic curves and dark bronze tones recall the distinctive stone and masonry used in historic buildings around Gramercy Park. It's also evident in the layout and materiality of the interiors, which is why *Garden's Edge* feels so at home in the Sky Garden Penthouse — where every room opens up to exceptional light and views, and where natural materials like white oak and stone create a warm and inviting oasis in the city.

Lisa Sternfeld, WELL-certified Interior Designer

Art has the power to regulate stress. Research in neuroaesthetics shows that simply viewing art can lower cortisol and increase dopamine, the same chemical released when we experience love or beauty in nature. These effects are especially important in dense, fast-moving cities, where overstimulation is constant and our nervous systems are often on high alert. Nature-inspired art offers a form of sensory restoration that goes beyond the visual - it helps the body return to a state of calm.

This connection reflects biophilia, our innate human affinity for nature and natural forms. The growing pull toward nature in design may be a response to the emotional intensity of urban life, but it also reflects something deeper. We're beginning to understand that the spaces we live in should support how we feel, not just how things look. At home, nature-inspired art supports that shift. It engages the parasympathetic nervous system, the part responsible for rest and repair, and becomes a quiet, daily source of grounding, connection, and calm.



Gold Flora

Image copyright: Courtesy of Julia Whitney Barnes

By installing art in a luxury residence, *Garden's Edge* blurs boundaries between public and private, permanence and ephemerality. How does that tension inform the experience of the viewer?

Jenny Mushkin Goldman, Managing Director, Arts & Culture

The exhibition is a reminder that while nature is abundant it is also fragile and ephemeral. To be surrounded by masterful depictions of flora and fauna inside a home creates the private opportunity to experience the beauty found in nature while with the underlying tension of time's inevitable impact, which serves as a reminder to slow down and appreciate the present.



Circle of Life

Image copyright: Courtesy of Julia Whitney Barnes

Each artist brings a distinct material language to the exhibition. How did those mediums converse with the architecture, and how intentional was their placement within the space?

Jenny Mushkin Goldman, Managing Director, Arts & Culture

This distinct materiality was definitely intentional and, in part, to reflect the exhibition's theme. For instance, Chellis Baird's intricate works are abstract and have a connection to flora and fauna with how the artist creates her compositions with a myriad of sculptural gestures reminiscent of vines and roots. Alexandria Tarver's paintings of monochromatic floral motifs border on abstraction, offering an elegant interplay between the recognizable and that which is left up to the imagination. Floral material is brought further into the space with Julia Whitney Barnes' elaborate cyanotypes, photographic prints made by pressing selected flowers to capture their essence, which she then hand-paints with watercolor to create enigmatic and celestial compositions that echo the penthouse's skyward garden setting.



Celestial Blue

Image copyright: Courtesy of Chellis Baird

What were the most surprising frictions or synergies that emerged between the artworks and the spatial logic of the penthouse during installation?

Jenny Mushkin Goldman, Managing Director, Arts & Culture

The penthouse is filled with brilliant natural light so there was certainly some friction in balancing artwork amidst walls of windows. However, with ample wall space and thoughtful placement synergy was achieved to balance the penthouse's ethereal qualities of light and air with the physical presence of artworks that embody elements of the earth.



Shadow tracing

Image copyright: Courtesy of Chellis Baird

How do you see this model evolving? Could the exhibition-residence become a new typology – a hybrid platform for both cultural production and high-end real estate?

Jenny Mushkin Goldman, Managing Director, Arts & Culture

Absolutely! Thoughtful exhibitions like Garden's Edge lend depth and culture to model apartments, elevating the focus of the spaces from a unit available for purchase to a lifestyle waiting to be embraced by prospective buyers.

For artists, model apartments are an exciting new platform to present their work and gain visibility. Collectors are able to see the art in the context of a home and see how it connects to architecture and design in a way a sparse gallery space cannot.



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