

RAISING THE BAR

GREAT LAKES BY
DESIGN

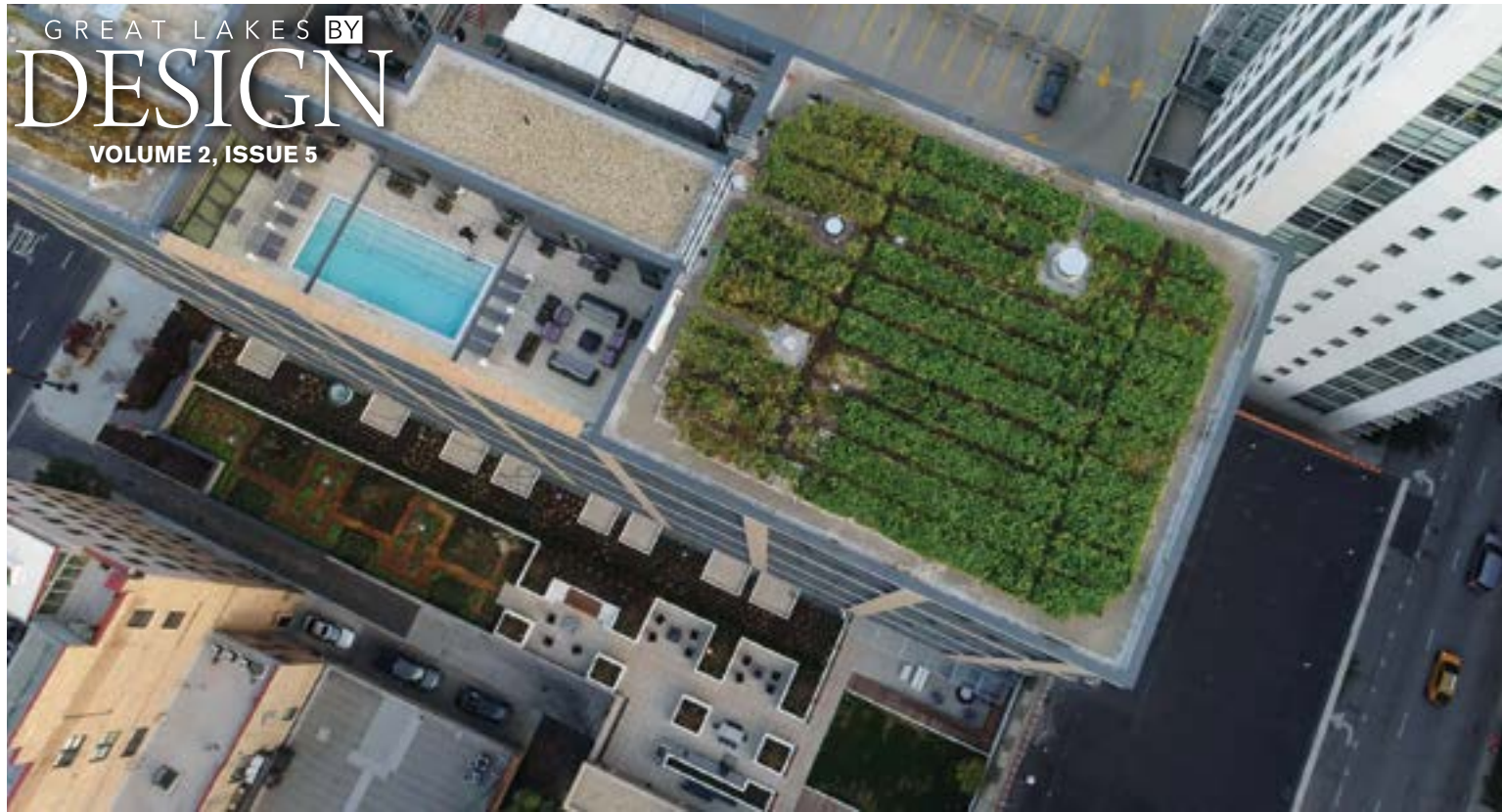


The celebrated home

For Jim and Lakesha Rose, creating a place to call home was a cherished labor of love.

RELISH | FORM | CREATIVE ENDEAVORS | TRAVEL

GREAT LAKES BY DESIGN.COM
VOLUME 2 | ISSUE 5
NINE DOLLARS



The agrihood

BY R.J. WEICK

The urban landscape of yesteryear has been replaced with a picture that is growing much more varied and nuanced in recent years. With the population growth in the top metropolitan areas across the country almost rivaling that of suburban migration between 2010 and 2015, according to the Urban Land Institute; the rich, diverse, and often dense landscape of the urban environment paired with growing interest and awareness in fresh, local food is driving innovation and creativity on the part of designers, developers, and investors.

There has been a renewed interest in

agriculture, use of land, and sustainability; and an exploration in the intersection of food and real estate, where food-centric amenities are integrated or leveraged through residential or commercial development. While many metropolitan areas are making an intentional effort at the city level to program rich green, public spaces for its community to gather, there are still areas that remain heavily concrete with limited access to fresh, local agriculture.

In Chicago's West Loop Gateway neighborhood, which is built on a history of industry and technology, EMME was

intentionally designed as a green sanctuary. At nearly 233,000 square-feet and 14 stories, EMME is a U.S. Green Building Council LEED Gold Certified mixed-use development project featuring 199 residential units, a 3,000-square-foot retail space, and more than 8,000 square-feet of roof area dedicated to urban farming.

"Sustainability to us, and to the client, is not just a LEED checklist," said Don Copper, principal at GREC Architects, an architecture and design firm in Chicago, Illinois. "It's not just making sure you check all of these things off. Gerding Edlen likes it to become part of the iden-

tity of the building and the residents as well."

Gerding Edlen Development, an Oregon-based vertically integrated real estate investment, development and asset and property management firm, acquired the site of the then future mixed-use apartment building in 2015. The firm is dedicated to developing a portfolio of vibrant and sustainable projects that positively enhance communities, neighborhoods, and the planet; and has cultivated more than 75 LEED Certified projects in its portfolio, including 23 LEED Platinum, 49 LEED Gold, and five LEED Silver.

While the site would eventually provide its own strong landscape story within its walls, EMME's project site marks the location of the 1886 Haymarket Riot in which workers rallied for fair labor laws and is commemorated by the Haymarket Memorial sculpture created by artist Mary Brogger. To maintain the integrity of the property's historical significance, the 14-story building was intentionally designed with a setback from the Desplaines Street frontage. The spatial programming not only provided a small garden plaza for the public to gather, but also connects the surrounding neighborhood to the building itself—a theme that carries throughout the building project.

"It was a fairly significant event. We didn't want to brand the building around the event, but we wanted to use the site as a starting point. We set the building back 30 feet in order to create this pocket park to give the monument some relief, but also to create a space where people can relax or contemplate," Copper said.

"There is not a whole lot of landscaping in this neighborhood, there is not much nature—it is pretty hard—so we also thought it was a good idea to create a little sanctuary in the neighborhood. Then that led to the layering of the monument, the park, and the lobby living room," Copper added.

Themes of sustainability, landscaping, and community are woven into a layered, spatial architectural program intentionally designed to activate space throughout the building—including the Desplaines Street frontage. The monument leads into the pocket park, which then draws the eye

into the interior lobby space through the large Mondrian-inspired picture window and the vibrant art beyond. Leasing and management office can be found in the loft space just above on the second floor, and there is commissioned artwork by Mary Brogger of twisted wire suspended adjacent to the concierge desk adding to the connection with the outdoors.

The sense of wander created by locating amenities and public gathering spaces throughout the different floors of the 14-story building are meant to support and facilitate community and connection; while the more minimalist, midcentury modern—with a flair for artistry—allows the architecture to not only stand on its own with an understated refinement, but also showcase the vitality of two urban farm roof tops featuring an assortment of mixed greens and edible flowers.

"We really wanted a building that encourages a strong sense of community. We tried to create spaces that get people out of their units and into those spaces and maybe get to know each other," Copper said. "That is also consistent in incorporating The Roof Crop in the building. We introduced them to Gerding Edlen, because we thought it was a good fit with the urban agriculture and the community building ethic."

GREC Architects had collaborated with The Roof Crop LLC, which is a Chicago-based urban farm using a green-roof system developed by Omni Ecosystems to grow food on roofs, on a previous project and brought the urban farm early on in the design process to help identify roof areas dedicated to urban farming. Tracy Boychuk, co-founder and manager of The Roof Crop, said being a part of all the conversations made for a really smooth process since they were brought in so early.

"It is 8,000 square-feet total, roughly, between the two areas and that would be our minimum of what we would want to take on as a roof that is going to have programmatic commitments and the engagements that we have," Boychuk said.

"We have different models. Some of the farms are on roofs that the building itself wants the food—those are a paid-to-farm model, so we are paid to basic-

ly maintain those farms and the product stays there. The majority of them we take over the green roof after it is installed and we are tenant farms and our rent is free maintenance," Boychuk added.

As the first residential building for the urban farm, Boychuk noted working with Gerding Edlen and GREC on EMME was an opportunity to do what the organization is calling programmatic commitments with the tenants. While not having them involved in the literal sense of being in the farm and in the gardens due to food safety issues and rules, Boychuk said the organization engages with the building management about four times a year to create activities for the tenants, such as a cocktail hour where the bartender used product grown on the roof.

"It was exciting for them to be eating stuff that was grown here and they have that connective experience," Boychuk said. "Then we sell to the restaurants in the neighborhood too, so there is an extension even within this neighborhood. It seems to be getting a really positive response from the tenants in just being a part of the community."

On the third floor, nearly 3,000 square-feet of rooftop area located above the parking garage is dedicated to urban farming managed and operated by The Roof Crop and their two full-time farmers. Boychuk noted the crop planted on the third deck will be different every year to provide a new experience for the residents, but will be more formal and recognizable produce, such as tomatoes, apple trees, basil, and edible flowers.

"It is really easy to engage with the tenants when it is this close and right next to what they are doing, but yet it was really nice that it is kept separate," Boychuk said. "People are really respectful, curious more than anything, which is really nice."

The remaining 5,000-square-foot area dedicated to urban farming is located on the 15th floor on the roof, which is allocated for more high-yield, high-production plants as well as meadow areas—a constant factor due to its ability to support fertility, pest control, and attract pollinators. While the top floor farm is really more about efficiency, Boychuk noted the crops are visible from the rooftop



pool, which may lead to taller flowered, value-added plants such as sunchoke to help residents make a more personal connection to the effort.

“Sometimes you see stuff growing and are like ‘what is that?’ It is interesting maybe, but they might not connect to it as directly,” Boychuk said.

The Roof Crop, which manages nearly eight roofs in the area and a total of 35,000 square-feet, leverages Omni Ecosystem’s proprietary growing media, which replicates native soil systems using light, effective substrate. The result is a farmable system nearly half as light as others in the industry not requiring nearly as robust as a structure as it otherwise would have.

“It speaks to teaming early on in the process, so that we made sure that the structure can support what The Roof Crop is recommending that we do and that we have adequate irrigation provided. For example, the condenser unit that runs the air conditioning creates a lot of water. It is very pure water, but it is a byproduct that is usually just put into the storm system and put into the sewer,” Copper said.

“What we are doing is capturing that and using it as irrigation for the crops. The cool thing about that is it is seasonal. You want air conditioning in the summer so that is when most water is produced and that is usually when you need water for the plants,” Copper added.

As a LEED Gold Certified building, EMME is designed to perform about 38 percent better than comparable projects. Sustainable strategies beyond the landscape irrigation reuse comprise high-efficiency lighting and plumbing fixtures, stormwater harvesting, sustainably produced building products and materials, landscaping palettes of native plant materials, resident-oriented programs to promote sustainable living, and reclaiming the heavy timber columns from the existing building to create the lobby concierge desk.

“The Roof Crop actually acts like a green roof and it filters stormwater and holds it on-site for a while before it goes into the sewer system,” Copper said. “It also helps the building insulation—the energy performance of the building is enhanced by that—and all these things are

conveyed to the people who live here, so they become more aware of sustainable living in an urban environment.”

The building itself, which reflects a taste for early modern architecture, features exposed concrete and brick tempered by glass gridwork on the exterior. On the interior, a strong art program featuring work by Lynn Basa, Robin Dluzen, Jose Pellot, Arica Hilton, and Mary Brogger paired with a more minimalist approach is reminiscent of the Bauhaus movement. A tempered, lighted glass bridge blurs the boundaries between the lobby and second floor mezzanine where a library—featuring a collection based off the concept of light, durable and textured flooring, and felt-wrapped plywood ceiling panels—and co-working space are located.

“We call this the loft library and it is meant to be an acoustically quiet and private area, but it is directly next to the big lobby and you can see the plaza in the front,” Copper said.

“I think the layering idea was what created how we configured all of the space. In terms of the actual materials and aesthetic, it is just kind of who we are: we are sort of like orthodox modernists if you want to call us that,” Copper added.

Other amenities found throughout the building—intended to facilitate a sense of neighborhood exploration—comprise a third floor amenity deck with grilling stations, fire pits, lawn, and connecting lounge featuring a commercial grade chef’s kitchen, and semi-private media areas; an indoor-outdoor dog run and dog washing station on the second floor; ground-level entry and storage for bicyclists; and a rooftop nest with a fitness center, yoga studio, pool partially enclosed by a brick framed structure, and smaller-scaled lounge.

Units are furnished with drop-in, Energy Star-rated appliances—allowing for versatility of space—Italian cabinetry and quartz countertops, porcelain panel backsplashes, stone vanities in the bathroom, LED lighting, wood flooring, Nest Learning Thermostats, and exposed concrete ceilings; lending a more neutral palette and material quality to the studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom apart-

ments.

As a mixed-used development project set in a dense urban landscape with sustainability, landscaping, and community at the core of its concept, EMME had its own set of challenges, but they were challenges in the positive sense, according to Copper.

“They are challenges that get us excited about pursuing them. As opposed to looking at them as limitations, we try to really dig into them and see how we can take this one step further,” Copper said. “They are challenges to make it better.”

Boychuk noted from a urban farm perspective now that The Roof Crop is actively farming in the neighborhood, one of the challenges becomes the same as anyone in farming and landscaping: traffic.

“It is finding a place to put the van when we have the farmers come up—they start harvest days usually at 5:00 a.m. in the morning, so they are beating the heat and traffic,” Boychuk said. “The idea is you want to do it as quickly and efficiently as possible and not interfere with tenant use of the space.”

GREC Architects, Gerding Edlen Development, and The Roof Crop collaborated with a multidisciplinary team throughout the design and build process to bring the EMME project to fruition. Other partners on the project comprise: T.Y. Lin, civil engineer; Wolff Landscape Architects, landscape designer; MACK Construction; WSP U.S.A, structural engineers; Integrated Design, enclosure systems consultant; Power Construction Company; WMA Engineering; and CharterSills, lighting designer. Since opening in Fall 2017, EMME has reached nearly 95 percent capacity.

“Ultimately it is about the people who live here. We have good ideas and we work with great people and we come up with great programs, but the real test of whether the building is successful is how the people live in it. Even if it is not being used the way we anticipated it, but it is being used and enjoyed,” Copper said. “It is really about the experience of the resident. That is the goal.”