Ranalli inspired by Wright for center

The New York City Housing Authority has built or plans to build 80 new community centers. One of the most distinctive, and the only one that may be mistaken for a Frank Lloyd Wright design, will be the $2.9 million Saratoga Community Center in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, by New York architect George Ranalli.

The new building, to be completed in June 2003, adds 3,500 square feet to the 16-story Saratoga Village residential tower. Ranalli's design recalls Wright in its broad, horizontal masonry volumes, massing, geometric detailing, and flow of spaces. Currently the dean of the City College of the City University of New York School of Architecture and Environmental Studies, Ranalli did his master's thesis at Harvard on Wright.

"The design of the building is a reevaluation of the idea of public construction seen as durable, strong, and permanent," Ranalli notes in his design statement about the community center. He expressed that permanence in materials such as brick on the exterior and mahogany doors and windows.

The steel roof structure (above) is exposed to the interior and is supported by paired steel columns. Inside, the community center will include a main multipurpose room, game room, reading room, offices, and kitchen. Ranalli is also renovating the existing 1,500-square-foot community center space in the residential tower to connect to the new building.

A large outdoor terrace will include an 18-by-19-foot concrete slab for viewing movies outdoors in warm weather. The terrace will be a social space for a variety of outdoor programmed activities sponsored by city agencies.

The community center building boom has included some notable completed projects, including the $5.9 million Melrose Community Center in the Bronx [March 2001, page 130] by Agrest & Gandelsonas and Wank Adams Slavin Associates. *J.E.C.*

The Saratoga Community Center by George Ranalli was inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright in its horizontal masonry volumes, massing, and geometric detailing.

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