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Building's Amenities Include Downtown Brooklyn Culture

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Downtown Brooklyn viewed from 66 Rockwell Place, a 42-story apartment tower that is bringing a variety of unusual cultural offerings inside. Emon Hassan for The New York Times

The Appraisal

By MATT A.V. CHABAN

The ecstatic moans echoed across the outdoor terrace at 66 Rockwell Place, audible even over the rush of traffic below on Flatbush Avenue. Some of those seated on the rattan patio furniture and folding chairs chuckled and gasped. Others rustled through their small bags of popcorn or sipped on plastic goblets of rosé.

It was quite the opening for a Friday night movie screening as the actress Natalia Tena straddled the actor David Verdaguer for the first five minutes of “[10,000 KM](#)” — a scene made all the more awkward since those in the audience were not sitting among strangers in the dark, but among neighbors familiar from the lobby or the gym.

A racy foreign indie film is not the kind of fare one expects to find in a building's common areas. But the owner of [66 Rockwell](#), a shiny and slick 42-story apartment tower, is trying to fit the building into the changing landscape of Downtown Brooklyn, largely by borrowing from it.

Like so much else in the borough these days, even the amenities are culturally literate and locally sourced.



The 66 Rockwell Place tower is owned by the Dermot Company.
Emon Hassan for The New York Times

This goes well beyond the Brooklyn trinkets in the library and the Stone Street coffee served at the in-house cafe. The building has begun a partnership with the nearby [Brooklyn Academy of Music](#), which is curating the film nights and other events, and two other neighboring cultural institutions, the [Mark Morris Dance Center](#) and [BRIC](#), the arts and media organization that puts on the annual [Celebrate Brooklyn](#) festivals.

Many residents feel the programs add cachet, though sometimes it can almost feel intimidating. Imagine attending a [yoga](#) class or salsa party with professional dancers.

“I was particularly terrified the first class, but the instructor was great and really worked with everyone,” said Carolyn Cochran, who moved in last November and said the cultural offerings were among the enticements to “pay more than is probably economically responsible.”



Cara Surico-Howell instructs a yoga class in EOS Fit's dance room at 66 Rockwell.

Emon Hassan for The New York Times

Passing through the lobby with her son Uzman, Joanna Pimentel said she worried about movies that were “fresh,” but said she looked forward to some of the art classes.

The building’s owner, the [Dermot Company](#), is no stranger to the neighborhood, having led the rebuilding of one of the first major residential projects in Downtown Brooklyn in 2008: the conversion of the old [Williamsburgh Savings Bank tower](#) into a retro condo building. Looking to endear itself to the neighborhood, Dermot began sponsoring events and discounted memberships to the [Brooklyn Academy of Music](#) for residents of its building.

As 66 Rockwell began to rise in 2012, Dermot wanted to push things further, out of both ambition and necessity. In the intervening years, the neighborhood had become an increasingly crowded place, with dozens of new towers springing up containing some 6,000 apartments, with twice as many on the way by 2024, according to the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership.



Besides having a lounge and library, 66 Rockwell pairs with the Brooklyn Academy of Music to present indie films connected with its various festivals. Emon Hassan for The New York Times

In these buildings, as well as those going up in the financial district, Williamsburg, Long Island City and beyond, add-ons like workout rooms, arcades, playrooms, pools and spas (for humans and pets) became so ubiquitous that they barely deserved mention as amenities anymore.

“We realized to succeed, we needed to program these spaces,” said Stephen Benjamin, Dermot’s chief executive. “Rather than turn to some national brands or specialist operators, we wanted someone with cultural and community connections. They’re right on our doorstep, after all.”

The Brooklyn Academy of Music will host screenings tied to its various festivals, including interviews with directors and actors. Mark Morris offers those weekly yoga and zumba classes, as well as special dance nights, and there is talk of pairing with the Brooklyn Academy for a music and dance performance on the terrace. BRIC will be presenting some of its more popular classes from the BRIC House cultural center just across Fulton Street, including stop-motion animation, drink-and-draw sketch sessions and “Smart Selfies,” which teaches photography fundamentals for cellphone shooters.



The BRIC House cultural center. Some of its more popular classes, like animation and photography, are being offered to residents at 66 Rockwell across Fulton Street.
Emon Hassan for The New York Times

“New Yorkers are so busy, even if we have these places across the street, it’s nice, after a long day, to have them downstairs, free of charge,” said Jessica Pierce, who turned the “10,000 KM” movie night into a dinner party, inviting a group of friends from outside the building for pizza and ice cream.

Still, the institutions are hoping this convenience could lead to converts. “It’s nice to go to the movies at home, but we’re hoping people might kick off their pajamas, too, and come visit us,” said Karen Brooks Hopkins, president of the music academy.

Dermot is paying the institutions for the programming, and many residents have gotten their first year free. But after that, it will cost \$60 a month or \$600 a year to avail oneself of the films, printmaking classes and tango lessons, as well as the building’s more traditional offerings, like the gym and pool tables. Members will also have access to programs in other Dermot buildings around the city, including one soon to open on the Upper West Side.

While cheaper than a gym membership, Dermot argues, the fees worry some residents, especially those among the 20 percent of units set aside as “affordable.”

Typical rents range from \$2,500 a month for a studio to \$4,500 for a two-bedroom (a \$10,900 penthouse is the only unit still available). Those in affordable units, who can make no more than \$30,000, pay roughly \$550 to \$750 a month, so putting a month’s rent toward fitness and cultural perks may be asking too much.

Mr. Benjamin said it was never Dermot’s intention to segregate its facilities. “This is about being able to provide the best services, not just empty rec rooms,” he said. He pointed out that the company had rejected other developers’ practices of placing low-income residents in separate wings, where they are cut off from most amenities. “We don’t do poor doors,” he said. “Our buildings are open to everyone there.”

And tenants in units that look down on the terrace might get an occasional freebie. “So long as they keep showing movies with subtitles,” said Ben Geary, who lives in an affordable one-bedroom, “we can watch from our apartment.”