

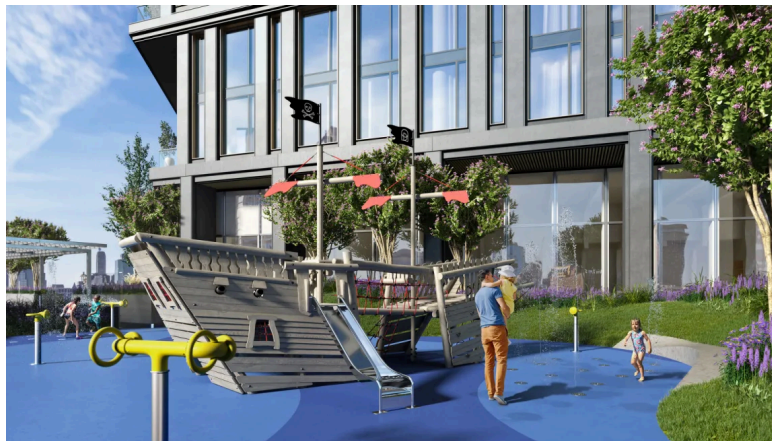
FASTCOMPANY

The hottest new condo amenity? A private playground for kids

Luxury buildings are competing for high-paying buyers, and playgrounds may be the latest wow factor.

By ELISSAVETA M. BRANDON

Impressions: 4,074,000



[Image: Marchmade/courtesy Olympia]

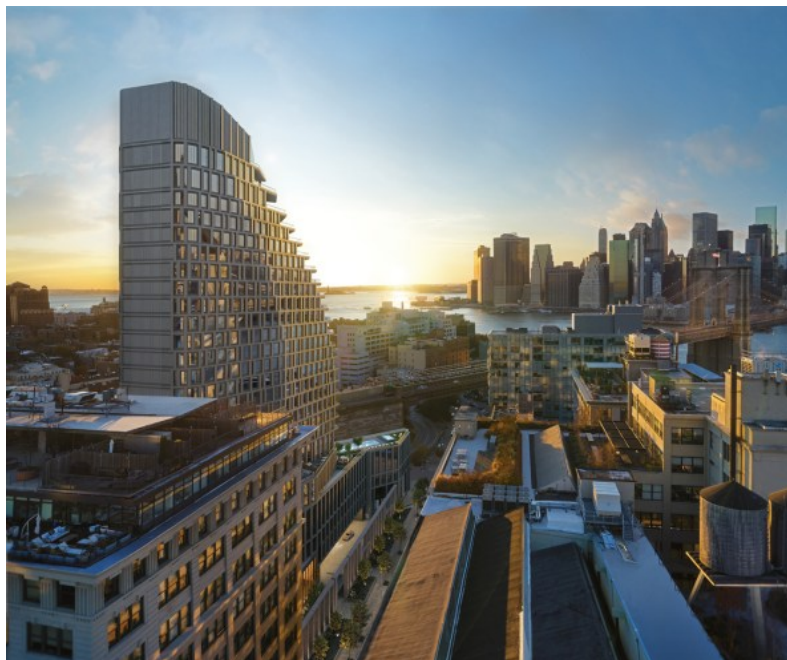
Nestled between the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges along the East River, Dumbo is well known for its loft conversions and bougie vibe. Now, a brand-new, 33-story glass condominium is bringing even more glitz to the long-gentrified neighborhood. Dubbed Olympia, the sail-shaped building comes with two pools, a private tennis

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court—and a striking outdoor kids area, complete with a shipwreck-theme playground.

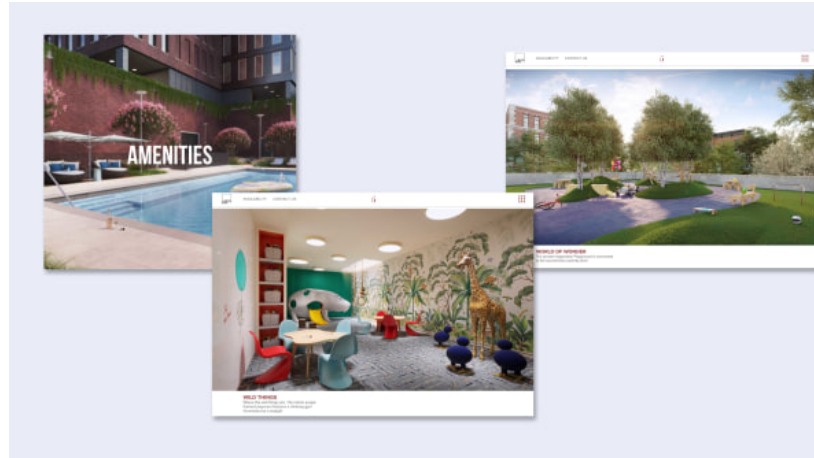
Olympia won't be complete for another year, but with 20,000 square feet of outdoor amenities located on a sprawling terrace, the building is already turning heads. The playground, in particular, includes a custom-designed area with slides, rope bridges, and water fountains. In a city where space is limited, a private outdoor playground remains a luxury, but now that the city's real estate market has [bounced back](#) from the pandemic, buildings are competing for high-paying buyers, and playgrounds may be the latest wow factor.



[Image: Hill West/courtesy Olympia]

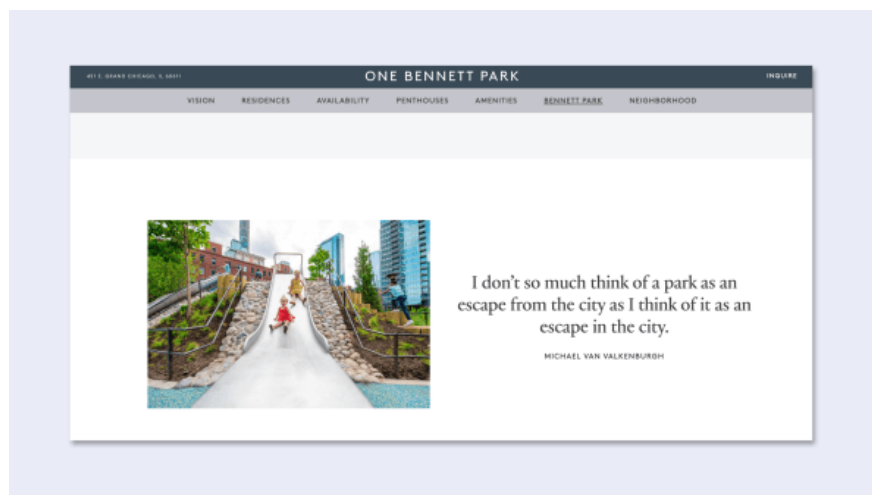
Olympia was developed by Fortis Property Group, a company with properties across New York, Boston, and Dallas. It isn't the only building with a private playground in the neighborhood. Not too far away in Downtown Brooklyn, 11 Hoyt boasts a 27,000-square-foot elevated private park, with a butterfly-theme garden and a jungle gym for kids. In Cobble Hill, [5 River Park](#) has a planted playground with a mini bridge and a verdant lawn. And Brooklyn Point, a building that made the headlines last year for its infinity pool on the roof, has a "forest adventure" playground, with a jungle gym and a splash pad just for residents. (The phenomenon extends to other cities, too, like Chicago's One Bennett Park, a 67-story skyscraper that comes with a two-acre green space, a playground, and two dog runs.)

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[Screenshots: 5 River Park]

Back at Olympia, the makeup of buyers had a lot to do with the decision to include a playground. “When you design a building, regardless of where the building is, and regardless of luxury range, as a developer you’re conscious of who’s your prospective purchaser,” says Jonathan Landau, CEO of Fortis Property Group. Here, he said purchasers were families and young couples with kids.



[Screenshot: One Bennett Park]

Olympia broke ground in 2018, well before the pandemic, but its cohort of outdoor amenities feels particularly timely given today’s focus on private outdoor spaces. The playground is nestled between a BBQ area and a tennis court, all of them located on the 10th floor. The shipwreck design was inspired by Dumbo’s history and location by the riverfront. “We wanted to feed into the imagination of what happens once a boat is capsized,” says Dessislava Boneva, a principal of DSLVL Studio, the Brooklyn-based firm that designed the children’s amenity spaces.



[Image: Marchmade/courtesy Olympia]

The playground features a jungle gym in the form of a shipwreck, complete with pirate flags and water guns. Meanwhile, an indoor playroom extends the nautical theme in playful ways: “The lighthouse becomes a slide, the waves are seats for video gameplay and book reading, the clouds are lights,” she says.

For Boneva, an outdoor playground is like an incentive for kids to come together and play outside. “[Playgrounds] are microcommunities for the children in the building, yet large landscapes for their imaginations,” she says.

“Microcommunity” is an interesting word choice, because that’s exactly what a condo like Olympia is trying to provide: a place where you can swim, workout, and go to the spa all in one place; where you can play tennis while your kids are in the playground next door.

That communal aspect is even more emphasized by the fact that the playground is for residents only. Developers are often encouraged to add public amenities—like a park or art sculptures—to get tax breaks. But to be accessed by the public, they have to be on the ground floor. At Olympia, the ground floor is taken up by a porte cochere for cars to pull right up to the entrance, plus parking, so the building didn’t allow for a public playground. Not that Fortis was going for one anyway. “Typically, when building high-end luxury condos, you don’t want to open your amenity space,” says Landau, citing issues around safety and maintenance.



[Image: Hill West/courtesy Olympia]

According to John Walkup, who founded the New York City-based real estate analytics firm UrbanDigs, there's also a financial concern. "Building something for the public that's going to have to live on the ground floor is really expensive because that's thousands of vertical feet you can't use anymore," he says.

For Walkup, much of it comes down to window dressing. If a building has a rich set of amenities with a cool factor, it can help buyers envision themselves in the space. This is why we stage apartments, and that's why real estate agents 20 years ago would bake chocolate chip cookies at an open house. "It's completely psychological," says Walkup. And when it comes to selling an apartment to parents with kids, a private playground certainly completes the picture (even though, realistically, the kids probably won't spend much time there).

In a city like New York, where many schools don't even have their own playgrounds, millennial parents are looking for amenities for their kids. Michael J. Franco has been a real estate broker at Compass for 14 years. He says that indoor playrooms have been so sought after for decades, they're now considered a basic amenity like a gym and a bike storage room. Outdoor playgrounds could be a natural next step: "It's about being outdoors," says Franco. "It's a unique amenity, and developers are always trying to find something new to attract buyers."

<https://www.fastcompany.com/90703900/the-hottest-new-condo-amenity-a-private-kids-playground>

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