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A Tree Grows in Queens

OSD completes Aviation Garden at Baisley Pond Park Residences, a New York hotel-to-housing conversion project by Aufgang Architects

By Daniel Jonas Roche

A former Hilton Hotel in South Jamaica, Queens, near JFK Airport has been repurposed into affordable housing for low-income and formerly homeless residents thanks to the Housing Our Neighbors with Dignity (HONDA) Act. The legislation enacted in 2021 expedites the conversion of distressed commercial properties shuttered during COVID-19.

The Baisley Pond Park Residences, designed by **Aufgang Architects**, opened to residents in 2025. Tenants of the 318-unit complex enjoy an Aviation Garden designed by OSD, an indoor green space that references JFK Airport, and the nearby TWA Hotel by Eero Saarinen.

The complex was developed by Slate in tandem with community development nonprofit RiseBoro. After opening last year, **Ariel Aufgang, principal of Aufgang Architects**, said in a statement “this successful adaptive repurposing can serve as a model to expand housing opportunities in cities across the U.S. for low income and homeless families and individuals.”



The Aviation Garden services Baisley Pond Park Residences. (Barrett Doherty/Courtesy OSD)

Hotel rooms were converted into studios, and one- and two-bedroom apartments outfitted with modern kitchen appliances. Wraparound services include classroom spaces, on-site social services, play areas, and community hubs. OSD's scope included 2,600 square feet of community space: An enclosed pool from the former hotel was transformed into a massive garden.

The Helipad Lounge by OSD provides seating, working, and social alcoves nestled among lush greenery. And the Propeller Farm operates as an indoor urban farm that cultivates food production by residents year-round. OSD drew from research by the Foliage For Clean Air Council and National Academy of Science to specify the plantings, meant to filter out common chemicals.

OSD also designed a 120-foot-long mural that lines the community space, an homage to Eero Saarinen. It features an abstracted drawing of the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, renditions of runway striping, and riveted aluminum planters that evoke Saarinen's TWA.

Simon David, OSD founding principal and creative director, said "the design is about new beginnings, creating a sense of hope and opportunity for buildings and the people who inhabit them. Picking up on the unique context of the JFK Airport, the materials, planting, arts, and furnishing in Aviation Garden celebrate the spirit of travel and adventure."