

# METROPOLIS VIDEOS

## CookFox Converts a Storage Facility into a Lush, Luxurious Apartment Complex

For 150 Charles Street, CookFox Architects paid special attention to the outdoor areas and the West Village neighborhood beyond.

by [Anne Quito](http://www.metropolismag.com/author/annequito/) (<http://www.metropolismag.com/author/annequito/>)

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([http://www.metropolismag.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/16\\_006\\_009\\_%C2%A9Bilyana-Dimitrova.jpg](http://www.metropolismag.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/16_006_009_%C2%A9Bilyana-Dimitrova.jpg))

A glazed wall from Vitrocsa opens the penthouse onto one of the building's generous terraces, creating a connection between indoors and outdoors that's hard to come by in New York City. **Courtesy Bilyana Dimitrova**

Making a 15-story tower feel intimate is no small feat. That's exactly what the New York–based firm [CookFox Architects](http://cookfox.com/) (<http://cookfox.com/>) set out to do when it took on the task of transforming the former Whitehall Storage Facility into a 91-unit luxury residential building on 150 Charles Street in New York City's West Village.

CookFox's design approach involved researching the past and future: The architects were attentive to the character of the far West Village but also infused the design with the forward-thinking tenets of green architecture, which earned 150 Charles Street a LEED Gold certification and a unique recognition of "superior landscaping" from the City Planning Commission.

Completed in 2015, 150 Charles Street is an alternative take on luxury living—one centered on giving residents a scenic and healthy retreat without being totally cut off from the surrounding neighborhood. In place of glitz and glass are meticulously designed open-air gardens and cascading terraces that connect its residents to nature and unobstructed views of the Hudson River.

But this enclave for the elite didn't sit well with longtime residents of the West Village. Some inhabitants of Jane Jacobs's former neighborhood stormed community meetings and filed lawsuits to block the construction. But developer Steve Witkoff was determined to make it work. He and partner Scott Alper negotiated with a dozen community boards and eventually gained the support of then–NYC Planning Commission chair Amanda Burden, who was on a crusade to plant a million trees in New York City.



(<http://www.metropolismag.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/COOKFOX-150CHARLES-F.OUDEMAN%C2%A9-06.jpg>)

Courtesy Frank Oudeman

Blending in meant designing a nearly 358,000-square-foot structure to the scale of the neighboring town houses. “We wanted to get the sense that the building had always been here,” explains architect Rick Cook. “Over and over again, we would ask ourselves, ‘Is this of the Village?’” CookFox used a 30-foot setback for the condo’s two towers so they’d be nearly imperceptible to passersby on the street. The building’s high-profile tenants appreciate the fantasy of retreating to an intentionally low-profile luxury refuge, Cook says. “The idea of disappearing into a warehouse is a very downtown thing.”

Inside, a picturesque garden framed by dramatic floor-to-ceiling glass walls greets visitors. True to its reputation as an exemplar of the burgeoning biophilic design movement, CookFox took seriously the design of the green spaces throughout the building, collaborating with landscape architect and restorative-garden expert David Kamp. “The day they craned the trees into the courtyard was pretty awesome,” says CookFox’s partner Pam Campbell. “It was a construction site till then, and then when the trees came, I could really see the building coming together.”

In fact, 150 Charles Street provided the impetus for the inclusion of the term “superior landscaping” in a New York City zoning resolution, in a section dedicated to the enlargement of existing buildings.

Kamp and his team at [Dirtworks Landscape Architecture](http://dirtworks.us/) (<http://dirtworks.us/>) selected plants that would thrive based on where they were planted, and every plant was cataloged so homeowners could replace them with similar species. For the ground-level courtyard, for instance, he chose lush flowering plants that would grow in a temperate forest—serviceberry and redbud trees, hornbeams, and ferns. For the higher floors, Kamp designed for desert conditions: He picked grasses and succulents to withstand the high winds and harsher microclimate.

Three years in, how do West Villagers like 150 Charles Street? “I think there was an assumption it wouldn’t look this way,” reflects Cook. “They haven’t complained since it’s been done.”