

CITYREALTY

INTERVIEW: Avdoo Shlomi on building in New York City with a sense of place



For some new developments, units, finishes and amenities are reduced into a formulaic checklist. The expanding New York-based development firm **Avdoo** takes a different approach. With over two million square feet of residential and mixed-use projects across the city and an additional one million square feet in the pipeline, the firm approaches each project as a dialogue between its site, its neighborhood, and the people who will ultimately live there. Rather than imposing one architectural signature across the city, founder and CEO **Shlomi Avdoo** wants every building to feel as though it belongs exactly where it stands.

That approach is visible at their recently finished condo **Bergen** in Boerum Hill, where architecture, interiors, landscaping, and programming were conceived as parts of the same experience. **The Bergen Collective** brings local organizations and makers into the building: **BKLYN Clay** programs the ceramics studio, **Kettl** is connected to the resident tearoom, and **Arts Gowanus** helps activate the art space. Mr. Avdoo explains that these are ways to bring the culture of the surrounding neighborhood inside the building.

Mr. Avdoo's path into New York City real estate development was not linear. Before entering the field, he worked in law and the financial markets and had earlier experience in hospitality and nightlife production. He began with townhouses and smaller residential renovations, then moved into larger condominium projects that offered the opportunity to mold not only individual homes but entire streetscapes. We spoke with Mr. Avdoo about why buyers have become more discerning about materials and design, how starting with townhouses influenced his approach to larger buildings, and why amenities should support everyday rituals rather than serve as a marketing checklist.

“EVERY PROJECT BEGINS WITH DISCOVERY. WHAT CAN THIS SITE TEACH US?” — CEO SHLOMI AVDOO



You describe Avdoo's developments as site-specific rather than driven by a repeatable formula. What kind of building are you determined not to produce?

The first thing is understanding that we do not impose one type of design or one design language everywhere. Every neighborhood should inspire the project. We bring world-class creative talent into a neighborhood, but the neighborhood and the site should help dictate what the project becomes.

Every project begins with discovery: What can this site teach us? You have to listen and understand that the architecture is part of a much larger world of designers, makers, buildings, and local traditions.

What we do not want to create is something that goes against that context or has no sense of place. We do not want to make trendy buildings that could be dropped into any neighborhood. New York is a city where every neighborhood is unique. The best architects and designers can respond to that difference without simply repeating themselves. You can tell when a project misses the mark.

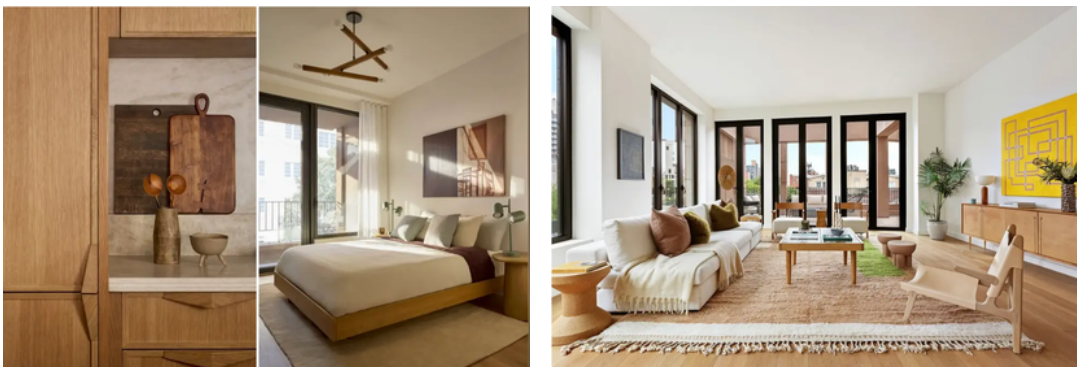


There seems to be a renewed appreciation for craftsmanship, masonry, texture, and traditional materials in New York. Why are buyers responding so strongly to those qualities now?

Buyers are very sophisticated, and they really care about design. Social media has changed that. People can spend thousands of hours looking at designers and projects from around the world, so their tastes have evolved and they have seen a lot.

They are also not necessarily tied to one geographic location anymore. The same buyer may look in Manhattan and Brooklyn. They tour several projects, ask questions, and compare what they are seeing. They can distinguish quality right away.

“BUYERS NOTICE WHAT DEVELOPERS SOMETIMES OVERLOOK: TEXTURE, LIGHT, AND EVEN HOW A DOOR FEELS.”



Ondel: What is your background, and what first drew you to developing residential buildings in New York City?

Shlomi Avdoo: I was always interested in creating from a young age, and I was very curious when it came to design. I worked on Wall Street and in the financial markets, and I practiced law for a couple of years. Before that, I had also worked in hospitality and nightlife, putting productions together.

At a certain point, I decided I wanted to make a switch. I did not want to simply repeat the same thing every day. Development gave me a very wide canvas. When I first entered real estate, we started with small townhouses, single homes, and renovations. Then the projects became larger and more complex, and that created a much larger opportunity. You are no longer thinking only about one residence. You can help shape a streetscape, a community, and the way people experience a neighborhood.

You began with townhouses and smaller homes. How has that influenced the way you approach larger condominium buildings?

Townhouses are very special. There is an exclusivity and privacy to them, and there is often an extraordinary amount of attention paid to every detail. Over time, buyers have become very drawn to that feeling, especially as privacy and smaller, more intimate projects have become more desirable.

At [Boerum Place](#), we were originally exploring a group of eight or nine townhouses. When the opportunity became a larger building, the question was: How do we make every residence feel like an individual townhouse? How do we create that sense of exclusivity and privacy, while also giving residents the amenities and services of a condominium building? That combination of both experiences became very important to us, and it influenced everything from the floor plans to the arrival sequence.

Materials are important because touch and feel are important. Buyers notice what developers sometimes overlook: texture, light, how a door feels when it opens, and how they are introduced to a residence. A brand may be recognizable from the outside, like a Chanel bag, but in a home the real brand is what you experience inside. It is what you touch and see every day.

Some buildings can feel as though they are lacking soul. If you are not obsessed with design, that comes through. We are obsessed with it, and buyers can feel the difference.



Amenities now consume meaningful space and development cost. Which ones actually improve residents' lives, and how did that thinking shape the Bergen Collective?

For us, amenities are about connections and everyday rituals. It is not only about creating another room in a building. You have to ask how the space will be used, how it will be programmed, and how it can connect the residents to one another and to the neighborhood.

At [Bergen](#), community was very important. We designed a ceramics room, but then the question became: How do we tie that room to the neighborhood and activate it properly? We reached out to [BKLYN Clay](#) about participating in the programming and creating classes in the building. They were excited about it because there was a shared passion for education, mentoring, and craft.

The same thinking led to the tea room and our relationship with [Kettl](#), as well as the art space and [Arts Gowanus](#). We also brought in local practitioners for fitness, wellness, and breathwork. Together, those partnerships became the Bergen Collective.



“WE SEE OURSELVES AS CURATORS OF DEVELOPMENT, AND THAT IS DIFFERENT FROM SIMPLY CHECKING BOXES ON AN AMENITY LIST.”



It worked because the partners were not chosen simply for marketing. They shared a real love for the community and for what they do. In some cases, there was no additional cost to us. We promoted their names through the project, and they helped us create something authentic and useful for residents. We see ourselves as curators of development, and that is a little different from simply checking boxes on an amenity list.

Every decision matters, even when the space itself is small. At our upcoming [Upper East Side project on 71st Street](#), the children's playroom is only a few hundred square feet. Because of zoning, so many amenity spaces end up below grade, but this playroom was able to be above grade. I said to myself, if we have this opportunity, we need to give it a lot of attention and make it unique.



“WHEN WE DO OUR JOB CORRECTLY, THOUGHTFUL DESIGN IS NOT ONLY AN EXPENSE. IT CREATES VALUE THAT BUYERS RECOGNIZE.”

New York City is now [taking steps to streamline development approvals](#). What still makes delivering completed homes unnecessarily difficult or unpredictable?

One of the challenges is that you are working with multiple agencies, including the Department of Buildings, the Department of Transportation, the MTA, and others. [The City of Yes](#) has created a lot of opportunity, and there are situations involving landmarks or air rights where development can also become part of a broader solution, such as providing accessibility improvements to a subway station.

DOB can actually be very efficient from the time you submit plans to the first round of objections. The greater difficulty often comes later, when you are completing construction and need approvals and sign-offs from several different agencies. Obtaining a certificate of occupancy can involve elevators, fire alarms, inspections, and other items that may add 16 to 24 weeks. If you fail one inspection, the delay can become significant.

As our buildings become larger and the city moves toward greater electrification, we also need Con Edison to install vaults and connect the power. At Bergen, obtaining the vault took a very long time. I wish there were a better way to streamline communication among everyone involved and make the process more seamless.

We all know there is a housing crisis. The faster these agencies and utilities can coordinate, the faster developers can deliver completed homes.

Is there a neighborhood in New York City that continually inspires you or that you are especially excited about now?

I have a great love for Brooklyn, and I wish there were more opportunities there. Projects like Bergen and Boerum Place are examples of how hard we try to create something that feels rooted in the neighborhood.

One area I am especially excited about is Hudson Square. It is this small triangle between the West Village and Tribeca, and for a long time it had very little new residential product. Now it is becoming a much more dynamic neighborhood, with new businesses, restaurants, and energy. We are working on a new project there [[68 King Street](#)] that will also fund making the local subway station accessible with a new elevator.

New York is very resilient. You walk around and feel that the city is alive. The greatest talent in the world still wants to be here, and there is tremendous demand for more housing. The opportunity is not simply to deliver more product. It is to deliver the right product, with thoughtful design, authenticity, and a real understanding of who will live there and what the neighborhood can become.

What do you hope an Avdoo development contributes beyond the walls of the building itself?

We hope that every project inspires others and contributes to a better streetscape. The goal is to create something thoughtful without losing sight of the budget or the realities of development. It has to be smart, but it also has to feel special.

When we do our job correctly, the building does not feel like a generic product. It feels authentic to its neighborhood, and residents feel that they are part of something larger than their individual apartment. That is where design, local partnerships, and community all come together.



SELECT AVAILABILITIES IN AVDOO-DEVELOPED BUILDINGS

Bergen Brooklyn, #120E
\$1,125,000

Boerum Hill | Condominium | 1 Bedroom, 1 Bath | 695 ft²

Bergen Brooklyn, #TH101W
\$4,650,000

Boerum Hill | Condominium | 3 Bedrooms, 3 Baths | 2,991 ft²

Bergen Brooklyn, #TH101W
\$4,650,000

Boerum Hill | Condominium | 3 Bedrooms, 3 Baths | 2,991 ft²

