

The Visionaire: A LEED Platinum High-Rise Condo in New York City

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By Deborah R. Huso

Built by the Albanese Organization, The Visionaire is the first residential high-rise condo in the United States to win LEED Platinum certification. Atop The Visionaire, pesticide-free rooftop gardens landscaped with native plants used harvested rainwater for irrigation.

Photo By Hulya Kolabas



While travel often changes the way people view the world, for Amanda and Jesse Glickenhau, it changed the way they wanted to live. When the two met as young teachers in the Marshall Islands in 2004, Jesse and Amanda were both searching for ways to better the world. Jesse, who now holds a master's degree in global affairs with a concentration in energy and environmental studies, was getting his feet wet in the hands-on study of climate change, while Amanda was teaching elementary school through the Dartmouth College Volunteer Teaching Program.

Education in the Marshall Islands

The Marshall Islands comprise more than 20 islands and atolls in Micronesia in a remote part of the Pacific just north of the equator. After World War II, the United States evacuated the residents of one of these atolls, Bikini Atoll, to conduct nuclear testing. Since then, its original residents and their descendants—now scattered throughout the Marshall Islands and elsewhere across the globe—have been working to obtain aid to clean up the radiation left over on the atoll in hopes of returning to their homeland. Jesse and Amanda were particularly struck by the determination of the descendants, but also realized that radiation cleanup is not the only obstacle potentially preventing the islanders from returning home. "Being in the Marshall Islands is what got me really interested in climate change," Jesse says, "because even though the Bikinians want to move back to their homeland, the atoll is threatened by rising sea levels."

A Home That Helps

When they moved to New York City in 2006, Jesse and Amanda were both dedicated to finding careers that would benefit others. Jesse started teaching climate change classes at New York University's School of Continuing and Professional Studies while working on his J.D. in environmental law, which he plans to use to work toward the prevention of water, air and soil pollution. Amanda, who entered nursing school after returning from the Marshall Islands, works as an obstetrics nurse at Mount Sinai Medical Center. But along with helping others through their careers, they also wanted a home that would be part of the solution for preventing global climate change. They began researching and discovered the recently built Visionaire in Battery Park City on the southwest tip of lower Manhattan. The nation's first LEED Platinum residential high-rise condo, The Visionaire has a solar panel array, an

HVAC system powered by natural gas and geothermal, and an onsite wastewater and reclamation system that supplies 25,000 gallons of water a day for use in commodes and the cooling tower. The couple also liked all the green space available in Battery Park City, where they could walk their lab/retriever mix, Molly.

Sustainable Style and a Nautical Theme

The Glickenhauses purchased a 1,700-square-foot, three-bedroom unit. Although they loved their building's green attributes, they didn't want to stop there. "We had a brand- new space free of toxins and low on environmental impact, and we wanted to fill it with furniture that wouldn't outgas chemicals," Jesse says. But finding healthy and eco-friendly furniture wasn't that easy. "Unlike green building and organic food, there's no green standard for furniture," Jesse says. "The labels and standards just aren't that well-developed."

So the couple sought the aid of Robin Wilson Home, an eco-friendly design firm in New York City. When CEO Robin Wilson saw the Glickenhauses' unit with its expansive views of the Hudson River, including the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, she says her first thought was, "How can we design it without detracting from the view?" She made her aim "quiet glamour" with subtle references to the sea and shipping to tie the home's interior with its expansive views. She also wanted to personalize the décor and meet the Glickenhauses' requirements: health, sustainability and comfort. "We wanted to make the space comfortable and inviting," Jesse says. "Amanda and I like things that are simple, clean and modern, but not sparse."

The living room is a case in point. Curling along the nearly floor-to-ceiling windows is an L-shaped sectional sofa from Room & Board upholstered in cotton with no toxic dyes or formaldehyde-based glues. The living room seating is centered around a coffee table made of steel reclaimed from a grounded ship, Wilson's first nod to the working water outside the windows. In a glassed-in corner of the living room, two ottomans covered in burlap bags from coffee farms offer another reference to the shipping industry, as well as the couple's travels. The artwork also plays into their past—after the stunning views, the living room's most prominent art is a series of photographs of marine life Jesse took while in the Marshall Islands. The pictures are framed over LED light boxes to provide ambient lighting at night.

The home's overall design is one of elegant simplicity and comfort. "I grew up with one of those living rooms that no one sits in," Amanda says. She wanted her home to be a place where friends and family would always feel comfortable.

"We wanted everything to be usable," Jesse says. "There's a lot of value in not worrying about it."

[Deborah Huso](#) is a freelance travel, home design and health writer.

Cutting-Edge Green Building

Built by the Albanese Organization, The Visionaire is the first residential high-rise condo in the United States to win LEED Platinum certification. A host of features helped it earn the rating. Here are just a few:

- High-efficiency, natural gas-fired HVAC system uses no ozone-depleting refrigerants; ventilation system uses energy-recovery technology
- 35 percent of base electricity load powered through renewable energy sources, including a 48-kilowatt photovoltaic solar electric system
- Lighting provided entirely by fluorescents and LEDs; a single master switch at the entrance of each unit turns off all lights simultaneously
- All appliances Energy Star-rated; all wood FSC-certified
- Windows are all high-performance, radiant low-E insulated glass
- Exterior made of 100 percent recycled terracotta and glass; at least 50 percent of building materials contain recycled content
- Nontoxic interior materials include bamboo, grass cloth, natural limestone, recycled glass, and low-VOC paints and stains
- Pesticide-free roof gardens recycle stormwater and mitigate heat retention
- In-building wastewater treatment system supplies toilets and central air conditioning units

A Chat with Amanda and Jesse Glickenhaus

What's your favorite element of your home?

Jesse: The kitchen that opens to the living room and the view from those rooms. I love being able to cook while guests are over and watch the sunset in the background.

Which room in your home do you enjoy most?

Amanda: I love our TV room (my craft room), which is actually one of the bedrooms. We didn't want our TV in the main living room, so we decided to use one of the bedrooms as a mixed-use room—it functions as a TV room, my craft room and sometimes as an office. It is the coziest and most laid-back room in the house. I have a whole closet for my craft supplies.

What are some of your hobbies?

Amanda: We both love to walk our dog, go hiking, travel (especially to Cape Cod and Colorado), and dabble in photography. I am also very artsy-craftsy—I love to scrapbook, make greeting cards and crochet. Jesse enjoys running, biking and cooking.

What's the best thing about your neighborhood?

Amanda: I love the residential feel of our neighborhood. It is a very dog- and family-friendly area, and there is a lot of green space.

What one lifestyle choice do you think most benefits the environment?

Jesse: Living in a city. Transportation is more efficient than in the country or suburbs because there is rarely a need to drive. I bike everywhere, but could also take mass transit. Apartments tend to be smaller and more efficient than single-family houses.

Resources

[The Visionaire](#)

[Robin Wilson Home](#)

eco-friendly interior designer

[ABC Home](#)

burlap ottomans, steel coffee table, aluminum bookcase

[Jensen Lewis](#)

bar stools

[Ligne Roset](#)

dining room table

[Pottery Barn](#)

dining room chandelier

[Restoration Hardware](#)

bedroom shelving unit

[Room & Board](#)

