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Modular apartment building rises in 19 days

All the pieces of The Stack, the appropriately-named, 28-unit, six-story apartment building in the Inwood section of Manhattan, have been assembled. "It almost makes your head spin."



Nineteen days. That is all the time it took to put up a 28-unit, six-story apartment building in the Inwood section of Manhattan this summer. The secret? Modular construction.

Working Monday through Friday from June 20 to July 18, a crew of just eight iron workers, a crane operator, and half-a-dozen helpers installed the 56 modules that make up the apartment building at 4857 Broadway. In a bow to the property's innovative construction technique, the building is to be

known as The Stack. It was created by a partnership of developer/builder Jeffrey M. Brown Associates and Gluck+ architects.

"We're now done stacking," said Peter Gluck, principal at Gluck+. "Building any building is a nightmare, but this was not a nightmare. Given that this is the first one we've ever done, this went amazingly smoothly."



The Stack Time Lapse, Video by GLUCK+.

Part of modular construction's appeal is that by building in a factory, the modules—as well as carpenters, plumbers, electricians and others building them—are protected from the elements, which helps ensure quality control and quicker construction. And when it comes time to put the pieces together, a building can blossom in just a few weeks.

"It almost makes your head spin," said Jeffrey Brown the CEO of the property's eponymous developer. There is also the benefit of price, which Mr. Brown estimates as 15% less than conventional construction.

In the case of The Stack, it only took a few months to prepare the site and lay the foundations, and all the while crews were busy building the modules at a factory in Pennsylvania.

As Crain's recently reported, modular construction is catching on in a big way in New York, and this is one of more than 17 modular projects underway in the city.

All that remains to be done on Upper Broadway is "zipping up" the development: connecting the pipes and ducts, building the elevator—the shaft for which was contained in one set of modules—and attaching the façade.

"Door bells, lights, switches, bathrooms, tiles, kitchens, everything's in there already," Mr. Gluck said. "Even the first coat of paint."

Mr. Gluck could barely contain his excitement for the project, though he did note that modular construction has its limits. "It's not a panacea," he said. "For the right job on the right site, it can be a

game changer, but it's not going to work on every application." In other words, conventional construction will hang around for some time.

Still, both partners said they look forward to undertaking more modular work. Mr. Brown said he's already scouted a number of sites in the city, including some that, like 4857 Broadway, are irregular and conventional construction is more difficult. Projects like those make modular that much more appealing.

"We've already invested a lot in this ... it would make sense to repeat it and take our lessons on the road," Mr. Brown said. "I think this approach is in its infancy. For the right application, we have a long way to go."