


 REAL ESTATE NEW YORK  
**FOCUS**

## Outside the Box

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"I know it's an old saying, but we really are a group of very diverse individuals who collectively are 'greater than the sum of our parts,' and I intend to make sure we stay that way."

The speaker is Ken Levien, president and founder of Manhattan-based Levien & Co. His firm does everything from project management (owner/tenant rep services), to physical assessments for acquisition, design and development performance analysis and reviews, construction monitoring and expert witness testimony.

Levien and company have worked on a broad range of commercial and residential assignments, including interiors, multiple-location and multi-building phased programs, historic landmark renovations and new technology. The company has a number of high profile projects to its credit, including restoration of the Central Synagogue at 55th Street and Lexington, seriously damaged by fire years ago. The list ranges from conversion of a 250,000-sf office/warehouse building into apartments, to the renovation of the St. James Church, the restoration and expansion of the fabled Harvard Club, multiple projects for Columbia University and over one million sf of corporate interiors including restacking Avon and Amerada Hess. In the past year, Levien & Co. has worked on over 30 assignments valued at approximately \$400 million.

The firm is currently serving as project manager at Columbia University's new faculty residence and K-8 Columbia School planned at 110th St. and Broadway. The new 12-story facility will include first-floor commercial tenants, followed by five floors devoted to the K-8 school. "Their role as project manager has allowed the university to fast-track this project," says Mark Burstein, Columbia's vice president of facilities management.

The conversion of the former Seigel's Department Stores office/warehouse into the Greenwich apartments, meanwhile, presented a number of challenges. For example, "we had to use torches and concrete saws to cut through the center of the building, because the city prohibited hard demolition," Levien explains. "An atrium was created to create more light and ventilation in the 93-year-old building."

One unusual trait of this smallish company, especially in its chosen field of endeavor, is the ratio of women to men-five to three. Rarely are women in the majority of any aspect of the commercial real estate industry, but project management seems increasingly to attract women. And don't expect a secretary to greet you at the door: Levien & Co. has no secretaries, bookkeepers, or even an office manager.

"We believe that if you do it yourself it will be done right, including all administrative tasks," says Levien. "Such a policy created pride in authorship and delivery, and almost guarantees the elimination of clerical errors. It also reduces overhead, which mean further remuneration for members of the firm."

*Levien & Co. has been taking on some unusual, high-profile projects with an unconventional approach to project management.*

Each staffer also handles a specific administrative area, such as health insurance or office supplies. "That gives everybody a break from their current assignments," Levien laughs.

Yet another element distinguishing Levien & Co. is that assignments are handled by one project manager from start to finish. There are no junior project managers or assistants to help the firm's eight members.