

THE COMMERCIAL OBSERVER

Ironstate's David Barry Is Skating Toward a Living and Retail Complex, Urby Staten Island

BY LARRY GETLEN AUG. 10, 2016, 10:30 A.M.

Speaking with David Barry, the president of Hoboken, N.J.-based Ironstate Development Company and the chief executive officer of Urby Staten Island, Commercial Observer was invited to sit in what could loosely be described as a fake house.

At a long table that fronts a professional kitchen, shiny new pans and utensils were gleaming, the room was high-ceilinged, but the space was contracted by enormous wooden beams that create the impression of a pitched roof indoors.

Concrete, a Dutch firm, conceived this design for what is essentially the lobby and social space for residents of Urby Staten Island, a new concept in urban living recently unveiled by Ironstate that combines efficient apartments with socially oriented amenities and retail.

“The house structure, these arches, that was an idea they came up with that was meant to simulate home because these projects are big in scale,” Barry said. “It was pretty commercial looking, so we needed a way to break that down and signal that this is not an office or commercial building. This is your home.”

Urby Staten Island is a \$155 million mixed-use development on the borough's North Shore waterfront, currently comprised of two four-story buildings, 7 and 8 Navy Pier Court (a third will begin construction later this year) with 900 apartments—studios to two-bedrooms with prices starting at \$1,500 and \$2,500, respectively—and 35,000 square feet of curated specialty retail shops at the base. The goal is to create a self-contained, replicable village that offers the best of urban life within the comfort of a tight-knit community.

The project is the culmination of several decades of development experience that has seen Barry and his partner and brother, Michael Barry, develop properties throughout New Jersey, then slowly progress toward larger projects in New York.

“Even in a city where you have really big thinkers, Dave is a big thinker among big thinkers,” said Frank Raffaele, the founder and chief executive officer of Coffeed, a coffee spot setting up shop in approximately 800 square feet on the ground floor of



DAVE BARRY (PHOTO: KAITLYN FLANNAGAN/COMMERCIAL OBSERVER).



Urby. “He’s a visionary, no doubt about it. He thinks long term and thinks for the greater good. I’ve spent many, many hours with Dave at this point. I’ve seen how everything is well thought out, community-driven and done for the best of the city.”

New Jersey native and current Soho resident, David Barry, 51, has run real estate developer Ironstate with Michael Barry, 49, for about 20 years. Their father, Joseph Barry, was an attorney and a developer of affordable housing in Hudson County, N.J.

David Barry followed his father into law, attending Columbia University for undergrad and Georgetown Law School. After a few years of practicing bankruptcy law at Dewey Ballantine, he left the profession around 1994 to form the real estate firm with his brother.

With their father’s help, the Barry brothers developed apartment buildings across Hudson County, then moved into New York City a few years ago with the Jefferson, at 211 East 13th Street between Second and Third Avenues, and the Standard East Village, at 25 Cooper Square between East Fifth and East Sixth Streets.

“Those things happened simultaneously,” David Barry said. “The Jefferson was a condo building [we developed]. The Standard East Village was an existing hotel that, after the crisis in ’07 and ’08, had gone back to its lenders. We purchased it and re-branded it and reconstructed the common area—things like that. It was a bit of a repurposing, but I would call it a development because it was a complete gut rehab and rebranding. It was a lot of work.”



INTERIOR OF COFFEE SHOP COFFEEED LOCATED ON SITE AT URBY STATEN ISLAND (PHOTO: KAITLYN FLANNAGAN/ COMMERCIAL OBSERVER).

While it could seem like a major shift, the move from developing in New Jersey to doing so in New York City was a natural progression for the Barry brothers.

“Part of what made us successful in Hudson County was our comfort level—our ability to understand that Hoboken and Jersey City [had become] extensions of the city similar to Brooklyn and Queens,” David Barry told CO. “It was such a Manhattan-centric world.”

As Manhattan has become unaffordable for so many people, making areas like Brooklyn and Hoboken, N.J., seem less forbidden, the notion of what constitutes “the city” has expanded. This helped ease the way for an urban development in Staten Island.



“Brooklyn was a dirty word 15 years ago—the ‘You must not be able to afford Manhattan’ mentality,” Barry said, noting that with Brooklyn becoming “acceptable,” other areas in New York City and beyond have followed. “Queens has now gotten to that point. Jersey City. And, I think, Staten Island and the Bronx are coming to that point. They’re in various stages of maturity.”

Hailing from New Jersey and having developed there extensively, Barry felt comfortable with the nearby borough because of its proximity and his experience developing similarly industrial sites to those found in Staten Island.

“We’ve done many waterfront sites where they were industrial, and we turned them over to residential or commercial,” he said. “It’s part of a bigger story for me that when we did a lot of successful projects in Hoboken and Jersey City, they were often former areas. In many ways, they were as emerging as Staten Island seems today.”

His time in New Jersey also gave him an inkling of the sort of demand he could garner for a Staten Island development.

“I had done some things in Long Branch and Asbury Park [in New Jersey,] and a lot of people from Staten Island were coming there and spending money there,” Barry said. “I had a lot of comments like, ‘You should really look at the Staten Island waterfront. I think you’d do really well there. There’s nothing like that here.’ ”

About five years ago, Barry had the idea for an outer-borough development that combined efficient apartment living with, what he called, “stronger connected social areas to add value.” Originally called Urban Ready Life, the development’s name was shortened in time to Urby.

To give the project a warm, homey feel, Barry sought out a European design firm, promising an escape from what he considers a sealed-off American mindset.

“I interviewed architects around the world, primarily outside the U.S., because at the time, my concept was spatially motivated,” Barry said. “Spaces being created [in the U.S.] were cookie-cutter repetitions of what had been done for many, many years in these cities. There wasn’t a lot of innovation.”

He met with Holland-based Concrete, which designed the citizenM hotel chain, with hotels currently in six cities including New York, London and Paris, and interiors for the W Hotel London, and was taken with their community-based approach to space. He commissioned the firm to design the development’s architecture, interiors and landscaping.

“They understood space in a more profound way than Americans, where it’s always, ‘Go west, build bigger, build more,’ ” he said. “They bring this Northern European aesthetic to the job. Maybe it’s not as austere as the Scandinavian aesthetic, but it’s somewhere in between that. It’s clean and modern but has a lot of natural materials.”

For its part, Concrete was quickly taken with Barry’s forward-thinking vision.

“A lot of residential projects look to one another, to the competition, but not to what the modern citizen needs in housing,” said Erikjan Vermeulen, a partner at Concrete. “Dave approached us saying, ‘I want to do it better. Can you guys help out with that?’ So it started with that ambition: Do we want to redo the world of housing? Of course we want to try to achieve that.”

Together, Ironstate and Concrete created an all-in-one community, a place designed for social living in a city where so many people have no idea who their neighbors are.

“The thought process of gated communities, of fortresses, doesn’t work in today’s world. It’s not how people live or what they want in the city,” Barry said.

Urby Staten Island, which abuts an esplanade just off New York Bay, consists of two facing buildings. Ground-floor retail will include a spacious Coffeed with several social areas; a large communal kitchen—the area described at the top of this story—



where the community's own full-time chef will prepare food (some of the details on this are still being worked out), offer cooking classes and be there to chat with as residents desire; and a community farm and beehive run by husband and wife, Zaro Bates and Asher Landes, who will sell the produce to residents at a farmer's market on the property, and also be available to commune with tenants who seek to participate in growing food. The project will also include an outdoor swimming pool, gym and bike room.

The 35,000 square feet of ground-floor retail space spanning all three buildings will also include the 200-seat, live wood-fire restaurant Surf BBQ & Grill; Bodega, featuring sundries as well as artisanal food; Brooklyn-based clothing boutique Lola Star; and a new restaurant from the team behind Brooklyn's The Pearl Room.

Barry believes the project contains several attractive and unique elements. First, the waterfront location gives it a romantic feel unique for the borough.

"That esplanade is one of the few areas in Staten Island where there's access to the waterfront," Barry said, "because ironically, even though it's an island, most of it's industrial. So it's hard to get to the water here."

The location off the bay also makes it ideal for the food and beverage concentration of Urby's retail.

"Waterfront in general merges well with food and beverage," Barry said. "If you want to go shopping for shoes or blouses or whatever, you go to a mall or some busy street in the city. When you take places on the waterfront that don't have that volume and are residential in nature, food works out the best. It allows people to access the riverfront, and it serves the local community."

To a certain extent, he's taking a page that Brooklyn and Manhattan neighborhoods have already written: He believes the immersion into food—from the waterfront dining spots to the in-house farm and kitchen—is key to the development's social aspirations.

"The purpose of [all this] is to connect people—the residents—around food because everyone has to eat," Barry said. "It's something that makes a lot of sense in terms of building loyalty and emotional happiness. A lot of the pattern with residential development in the past has been, 'Here it is.' When amenities are planned, there's not a lot of thought given to how to use those amenities. They are used for marketing purposes, like, 'OK, you guys figure out what to do with it.' [We wanted a] bigger commitment to emotional connection and social programming."

One other notable aspect to the development's retail is its rejection of chain stores, relying instead on local merchants.

"I just don't think [national chains have] much appeal or interest," Barry said. "Part of this is about creativity, with creating a place, and it's more interesting to do that with concepts that aren't so fully baked and rolled out a million times. Another thing is, the reason retail in the city has gotten so uninteresting lately—and everyone complains about it—is because it's just national chains with national credit that can pay a few dollars more. Creativity is a part of Urby—the vibe, the experience. For that reason, looking for local and regional players is more interesting."

Urby Staten Island began residential move-ins in June and expects to be at capacity within about a year. On the retail end, Bodega is open already, and Coffeed opens this month (the rest will open in early 2017). Barry estimates that 50 to 60 percent of residents have come from elsewhere on Staten Island, about 30 percent from Manhattan and 10 percent from Brooklyn and elsewhere.

In addition to the Staten Island location, three other Urbys are currently underway: Jersey City, which opens in November; Harrison, N.J., which should begin welcoming residents in about a year; and Stamford, Conn., where Ironstate is planning a first-quarter 2018 opening.



After getting a sense of how they're received, Barry would love to take the concept even farther.

"I think it could make sense in many urban areas, both in the U.S. and potentially overseas," Barry said. "It's a really different, smart concept. Very, very few developers are putting this much commitment into rethinking how people live and interact. Urby is very current with how the world is today. I don't see a limit to it if we execute it well."