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## Greater Aims Than Marketing With a Film Starring Green Luxury Apartments



Veronica Mainetti, the developer of 60 White, and the filmmaker Daniel Fickle inside the building in Manhattan.

MICHAEL APPLETON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

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The Appraisal  
By MATT A. V. CHABAN

The film shows a man in a leather biker jacket and a woman in an oversize black parka leaning against the gunwale of a boat, staring up at the huge icebergs floating by, dressed more for the cobblestones of SoHo than for the shoals of Greenland. The camera captures their amazement at the drifts of glacial beauty. Just then — crack! — both jump as a piece of ice the size of a townhouse cascades into the water.

“I wanted to go see firsthand what the effects are of climate change and carbon emissions,” the woman in the parka, [Veronica Mainetti](#), said last week while sitting on a green leather couch inside 60 White Street, a loft building in TriBeCa. “To see it, and to hear from the biologists and the climatologists — and the Greenlanders, what they’re going through. I knew we had to do something, but I was determined to do more.”

So she decided that [60 White](#), the conversion of an 1869 loft building into multimillion-dollar apartments and the latest project of her family’s development company, the Sorgente Group, should do its part to save the world. Ms. Mainetti thought the eight-unit project could have an even bigger impact if the world knew about it, too. The building is now the star of a documentary, “[Giglio on White](#),” about its redevelopment, with Ms. Mainetti co-starring as the crusader turning environmental anxieties into luxury accommodations one locally sourced granite countertop at a time.

Equal parts “[An Inconvenient Truth](#)” and “This Old House,” the film follows Ms. Mainetti and [Daniel Fickle](#), the director and her companion on the trip to Greenland, as she searches for the most airtight windows, battles with New York bureaucrats, rattles off statistics (70 percent of the city’s energy goes into its buildings) and makes a side trip to those glaciers.



A rendering of 60 White Street, a loft building in TriBeCa that is being converted to environmentally conscious luxury apartments.

Only a four-minute trailer exists at the moment, helping to lure buyers of the \$4 million to \$10 million apartments, and they will eventually receive a copy of the film when it is completed next year. But the ambitions are much greater than marketing.

"We'd love for it to premiere at Tribeca," Mr. Fickle said, referring to the film festival founded by Robert De Niro and held annually a few blocks away. "Wouldn't that be perfect?" And then on to an air-conditioned multiplex, perhaps.

The name "Giglio on White" comes from the Giglio brand of environmentally sensitive condos that Ms. Mainetti hopes to introduce with this project. For those who might consider luxury real estate and environmental conservation to get along like an oil slick and water, Ms. Mainetti said that view misses the point. "If even one person sees what we've done and changes the way they build, or live, the movie will have been worth it," she said.

"It's not about million-dollar condos," she added. "It's about what comes after them."



As unconventional as the film is, the person behind it is even more so. In an industry propped up as much by testosterone as by steel and concrete, it is unusual to find a woman at the helm of a major firm.

Ms. Mainetti was born in Rome into a family of Italian developers, though they got their start here in New York, where her great-grandfather lived for a time building iron frames for early skyscrapers in Manhattan. Ms. Mainetti returned to get an architecture degree at Columbia but instead went into the family business in New York. After the company's first major acquisition in the United States, the Flatiron Building in 2005, she took over North American operations, which also include properties in Los Angeles.

The redevelopment of 60 White Street, bought for \$23 million in 2010, involves the conversion of three former commercial buildings, one of which will continue to house offices, albeit high-end ones, while the other two become condos.

Ms. Mainetti sees preservation as the first step in sustainability. "By extending its life, maybe we extend our own," she said of the buildings.



Ornate iron cast pillars inside the new environmentally conscious apartment building.

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When it came time to fill those buildings, she insisted on sourcing everything locally. The toilets and showers are not from Milan or Tokyo but Sheboygan, Wis. — top-of-the-line Kohler models. The slate tiles come from upstate New York, and the marble is quarried in Danby, Vt.

“People come in here and they ask me if this is Carrara marble, and I say: ‘No! And you know, it’s twice as old,’ ” she said.

Since it was as important for Ms. Mainetti to document this work as to do it, she reached out to Mr. Fickle, whom she met a decade ago at an event at the New York Film Academy, where he was teaching.



The renovation in progress.

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“This isn’t just the story of the technology and the building,” Mr. Fickle said, “but also the story of her, the drive and the passion of what she wants to do, to make a difference and change the way we build.”

Beyond the trip to Greenland, he follows her to the quarries in Vermont and a mill in New York, where old water towers are being turned into paneling for the penthouse. In between, there are stops at the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission, where Ms. Mainetti fought for a year to get modern triple-pane windows approved.

Mr. Fickle said he wanted the film to have a "cinematic feel" that is both narrative and contemplative, like a Terrence Malick film, while making the building come alive as its own character.

"Environmentalism can be so dry," Mr. Fickle said. "We want to show it in everyday life."

Or at least the everyday life of those who can afford it. Whether or not the film plays at a theater near you, the practices it highlights just might wind up next door. Almost every green breakthrough, after all, like solar panels and hybrid cars, was a luxury good until enough wealthy people bought into it to create a wider market.

"There is a certain trickle-down effect when it comes to green building," said Russell Unger, director of the Urban Green Council, an advocacy group for sustainable building in New York. While he is skeptical of the appeal of the film, he sees the building itself making up for that.

To Ms. Mainetti, there cannot be one without the other.

"We need to lead so it can be possible for everyone to have this," she said.