

Alex Yang

Prof. Sabir Khan

ARCH 4128

Making Sense of Architecture at Large: Vertix Building and Natural Gas HQ

At first glance, the Vertix Housing building looks unassuming, unimposing, and mediocre. It blends in with the other buildings surrounding it and seems unremarkable in the realm of architecture. Viewed from afar, most would not give it a second look. In contrast, the Natural Gas HQ looks unique, unambiguous, and exceptional. It towers over the beachfront skyline and looks extremely different from its surroundings. However, upon closer inspection, it is Vertix Apartments that is truly unique and the Natural Gas HQ that is unexceptional.

From afar, Vertix Apartments blends in with its surroundings because of its uniform shape and color. It appears to be a simple rectangular prism and looks darker than its surroundings but does not look unique. Up close, however, the facade's unique features stand out. Playful corrugation in the facade's twists and folds provide some nice visual flair that sets the apartments apart from the other buildings. Additionally, the black painted wood panels contrast heavily with the more muted surroundings. Most notably, however, the facade is actually alive. As the light conditions, tenants attitudes, and climate change, the tenants slide the panels around in order to suit their needs. This means that the facade changes over time, literally recording its users' lives on its face. Multiple components of architecture come together to make Vertix Apartments look inviting and aesthetically pleasing: the shifting panels, playful structure, and separation of privacy. The facade is subdivided into different areas of privacy that offload stress from the tenant onto the building. The bottom portion of the facade is covered with blue-gray tinted windows, often covered with graffiti and posters, and is the most public and

accessible to all passersby. The middle of the facade is the stairway, and is covered mostly by glass, accessible only to tenants. It is clean, sterile, and simple, inviting potential clients to live there. The most private portion of the facade is the shifting portions covered with sliding panels. It is extremely customizable and blocked off from all other people. Glass balconies wall the space off and make it clear it is a private area. Overall, this makes Vertex unique in its focus on tenant empowerment and playful visual distinction. It is common for an architect to let their work shape a resident, but it is far less common to explicitly design around the residents shaping the architecture.

The Natural Gas building, on the other hand, is centered around the idea of control. Its incredible form consisting of several blocks stacked on top of each other looks unique, but it is nowadays a common staple among city skylines. Its facades meld together, covered with panels of reflective glass and laced with metal seams. These reflections lend the building a shifting, shimmering work. This shifting facade is not a product of its residents, however. Rather, it is a product of the surrounding circumstances. This serves as a good metaphor for the controlling atmosphere that the building gives its residents: it is designed to provide a space to work, not a space for freedom. Its facade is uniform and not subdivided into areas of privacy because all areas are around the same level of private. Through a uniform, imposing, and overall corporate style, the Natural Gas HQ exerts a subtle yet foreboding atmosphere of control on its tenants.

Ultimately, the two buildings use their facades to show the balance of power. While Vertex uses its facade to give its tenants power, the Natural Gas HQ uses it to let its tenants know their professional lives are out of their hands.