Green Roofs

What insulates your building, making it cooler in summer and warmer in winter; helps protect your building from leaks from heavy rain and snow; is aesthetically pleasing; can serve as a vegetable and herb garden and home for honeybees; can enhance the performance of photovoltaic arrays; and boost urban biodiversity by creating avian habitat? That's right, you got it in one: a green roof.

I went to a very interesting program last night, *Expanding Green Roofs in NYC: A Dialogue with the City of Copenhagen*, sponsored by the Guarini Center at NYU Law and the Danish Cleantech Hub.

Presentations led off the program, first by Mette Skjold of SLA, a Copenhagen-based landscape architecture firm. They have some extraordinary projects in their portfolio and more on the way. Skjold's presentation emphasized the capacity for not only building a green roof but integrating it with the façade and the landscape, as, for instance, with this exciting project in Paris. She was followed by Herbert Dreiseitl, director of the Liveable Cities Lab of the global engineering and design consultancy, Ramboll. His bio described him as, among other things, a "water artist." His focus in the talk was on Blue-Green Infrastructure (BGI). That was a dominant theme of the evening: bringing nature back into our urban environments. (This was resonant for me on several levels, but I flashed back to 1986 when I was the coordinator for a coalition of New York State open space and historic preservation groups, the Green Apple Coalition, pushing for bond money for worthy projects. I have watched as this particular city's green open spaces have battled for every square meter they can gain and in many places simply preserve from the developer's wrecking ball.)

The presentations were followed by a panel discussion with two New Yorkers and two Danes in the thick of promoting green roofs. We heard from Alan Steel, for instance, CEO of the Javits Center, describe their sustainability initiatives including the second-largest green roof in the

U.S. (Here's #1, part of an extraordinary industrial complex designed by the visionary architect, Bill McDonough.) We also heard from Lykke Leonardsen who is chief of the Resilient and Sustainable City Solutions program for Copenhagen. She's concerned with keeping her city alive and prospering in the teeth of what could be some devastating impacts from climate change. "Cloudburst mitigation" is a central concern, and rethinking urban water is a major theme in Denmark. They're on it. And green roofs are a critical part of the game plan.

The word has been getting out for some time. Architects, city planners, developers, landscape architects, engineers, among others, are on board. There's a growing infrastructure, or should I say ecosystem, of dedicated souls working to build better ways to be in our cities. Green roofs are one important way to go.