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SPACES | By Dana Rubinstein

## Cans, Bottles, Opera House

Architect Annabelle Selldorf, known for glamorous projects like the interiors at Philip Johnson's last residential building, the Urban Glass House, and the condo tower at 200 11th Ave., where cars get their own elevators, doesn't often get the chance to design industrial space.

So she leaped at the opportunity to plan the new recycling transfer station that Sims Metal Management is building next to a Superfund site in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Overlooking the entrance to the polluted Gowanus Canal, it will play a key roll in processing the beer cans, water bottles and other recyclables New Yorkers discard curbside.

"When you can do something for the public it lends one's work a special meaning," Ms. Selldorf says.

The massing of the 130,000-square-foot Sunset Park Materials Recycling Facility, largely corrugated metal and galvanized steel, has, from certain angles, an insectlike grace to it. Operators of 200-foot barges boats piled high with discard from Queens and the Bronx, will dock alongside the so-called tipping building, whose dark trusses will, like a series of long legs, arch over and surround the vessels, shielding them from the elements. There will begin the complex sorting process by which glass and bulky metal gets sent to

Jersey City, aluminum to domestic smelters, tin to domestic steel mills, and plastic to domestic and international markets.

Projects like this one and Dattner Architects' crystal-shaped salt shed destined for Hudson Square, are a throwback to the quality that used to more regularly accompany industrial architecture in New York City, much of it since converted into SoHo lofts and Meatpacking District nightclubs.

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"We certainly had the prerogative of building a plain, boring, typical transfer station kind of project," says Daniel Dienst, group chief executive for Sims Metal Management, which processes nearly all of the city's curbside recyclables. "But if you look at Sydney, Australia, with the opera house built on a jetty sticking out into the bay, you sit back and think, 'Wow,' and ask is there a way to build something more interesting than the typical waste transfer shed."

The facility will occupy an 11-acre pier at the end of 30th Street in Sunset

Park, formerly home to a police impound lot for evidence vehicles. It sits across the water from Ikea in Red Hook. The facility also will have a strong educational bent, with classrooms for students interested in learning about recycling, a viewing corridor allowing visitors to see the process in action, and about 2.5 acres of green space, which, if Sims has its way, will be manicured not by lawn mowers, but by grazing goats.

To its credit, Sims is clearly paying a great deal of attention to the symbolism of the facility, and to the ability of good architecture to embody an organization's public mission. Sims espouses a green alternative to waste management, one that relies not only on recycling, but also on an increase in the transfer of waste via barge and rail.

The facility, which is slated for completion by summer 2012, will also boast about 50,000 square feet of photovoltaic cells and, bureaucracy permitting, a wind turbine.

At the moment, construction crews are busy prepping the site, which includes elevating it by up to four feet to allow for the impacts of global warming on sea level.

"The city entrusted us with a beautiful piece of property," said Mr. Dienst. "It's not beautiful right now, but it will be."

