

Inside Simon Dushinsky's Rabsky Group

Quiet giant of Brooklyn development now plans to build tallest tower in Fort Lauderdale



Simon Dushinsky and renderings of The Ombelle at 300 Northeast Third Avenue (left), and 633 Southeast Third Avenue in Fort Lauderdale (Renderings courtesy of VERO)

- [Keith Larsen](#)

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Simon Dushinsky is the Alexander the Great of Brooklyn.

His firm, Rabsky Group, constructed some of the borough's biggest buildings and scored its largest loans, one successful campaign after another. And he's done it all seemingly without institutional money.

"There is truly no one like Simon Dushinsky. He is a legend," said Ofer Cohen, founder of the Brooklyn brokerage TerraCRG.

Dushinsky is a rarity in modern-day New York real estate: He doesn't hail from a [dynastic real estate family](#). And, importantly, he continues to scale without a major financial blowup.

He is a "silent assassin," another leading New York developer said.

Now he is eyeing the next conquest.

The developer, who lives within the insular Vishnitz Hasidic sect in Williamsburg, is planning three towers in Fort Lauderdale, including a tubular, multi-tiered structure that looks like something out of the movie “Blade Runner” and would be the tallest building in the city.

It will be a challenge. But sources suggest Dushinsky is more than just a capable dealmaker.

Everyone in real estate calls themselves a developer. In reality, most are glorified asset allocators; they buy properties the way you pick stocks. They hire management firms to handle the day to day, take advantage of generous tax benefits and watch the rent come in on a software portal.

Not Dushinsky. Those close to him said he is intimately involved in every meeting, conscious of every element of the process, from zoning codes to air rights assemblage to design.

A spokesperson for Rabsky bragged that half of the firm’s success stems from its in-house construction arm. It propelled the firm to rank fifth on *The Real Deal’s* [annual list of developers in New York City](#), behind only major players like Silverstein Properties and Extell Development. Rabsky’s 10 projects under development total 1.7 million square feet.

Rabsky is a force to contend with in Brooklyn. But Dushinsky and his partner Isaac Rabinowitz remain a mystery outside it. We can only guess at [the reasons for Fort Lauderdale](#).

Simon at work

Rabsky Group has no website. There are no shiny offices either. It operates out of a nondescript building in South Williamsburg that sits in front of a warehouse that sells sukkahs.

And Dushinsky and Rabinowitz — “Rabsky” is a portmanteau of their last names — are press shy. The longest contact the group has ever had with the press may well be for this article, and even that was limited. Dushinsky declined to be interviewed. Rabsky’s employee and spokesperson, Hersh— whose last name the firm wouldn’t give — and Dushinsky’s Florida partner Isaac Schlesinger spoke to *TRD* on a single Zoom call. They joined the call with their phone numbers, video off.

“He definitely doesn’t like publicity,” said David Junik of the Brooklyn-based brokerage Pinnacle Realty. “He likes to stay below the radar.”

But Dushinsky is a fixture in his community. Sources told *TRD* that he's often found at the Vishnitz community shul in Williamsburg and has occasionally been seen smoking slim Marlboro cigarettes. Dushinsky sports a long black beard and wears traditional Hasidic garb.

Those who know Dushinsky say he is a charismatic person and relentlessly positive. One notes his embodiment of "bitachon," loosely translated as trusting in God. It's a confidence, or optimism, that God will bless you.

"He is always too busy, but he will always stop and ask how you are," one community member said. Not for long. "He only has two minutes to speak."

Dushinsky confirmed it in a recent deposition for a lawsuit in New York Court: "I'm a very, very busy guy," he said.

The work pays off. People thought Dushinsky was crazy when Rabsky started building in North Williamsburg before values exploded. Now, he seems prescient. For example, Rabsky paid \$4 million for a stake in six industrial buildings in Williamsburg in 2007. He built the 113-unit rental, the Driggs, at one of the sites at 205 North 9th Street in 2011. He [sold](#) the apartment complex for \$71.5 million last year as part of a larger \$113 million deal.

"There's no bullshit. He will say, this is what you are going to do. And in two weeks I want to have a shovel in the ground." anonymous source on Dushinsky's construction management style

Dushinsky runs his operation differently than his peers. Rabsky does not use outside partners, and Dushinsky or Rabsky principals review every design filing, floor plan and structure.

"He's big enough to build substantial structures and make a huge difference, yet small and intimate enough to make quick and nimble decisions," said [Eran Chen at ODA](#), which is the architect for Dushinsky's Fort Lauderdale projects.

"He's going daily to almost all of his projects," said Hersh, the spokesperson. "He really cares about every small detail." (Some of the 10 projects currently under construction in New York City are miles from each other.)

One person who works regularly with Dushinsky noted his direct communication style. "There's no bullshit," said the source, who requested anonymity. "He will say, this is what you are going to do. And in two weeks I want to have a shovel in the ground."

“He will call me all hours of the day, where are we with this, where are we with that,” said Jeffrey Zwick, a real estate lawyer who has represented Rabsky Group. But while Dushinsky is a silent giant in Brooklyn real estate, his partner, Rabinowitz, keeps an even lower profile. Rabinowitz focuses more on design, while Dushinsky handles the day to day, according to sources.

“We are two partners, we do everything together,” Rabinowitz said in a deposition in 2012. “Twenty times a day we have meetings together.”

Two years ago rumors circled that Rabinowitz and Dushinsky had split. Within the Hasidic development world, this would have been like the late Charlie Munger leaving Warren Buffett.

But a Rabsky spokesperson denied the separation.

“I can’t speak to rumors, but I don’t see it,” said Hersh. “I’m seeing them working every day together, sitting together, going to job sites together, looking at deals together. I’m seeing the same relationship that I saw.”

Becoming Rabsky

Rabsky began in [Kiryas Joel](#).

The Hasidic enclave in Rockland County has been called an American shtetl. Founded in the late 1970s by the grande rebbe of the Satmar sect, Joel Teitelbaum, it became one of the fastest-growing communities in the country. With that came an urgent need for new housing.

Dushinsky and Rabinowitz, both Hasidic immigrants from Israel, saw an opportunity. Rabinowitz had built homes in Jerusalem for the Ultra-Orthodox community for about a decade, using a largely Arab labor force. He had little formal construction education, but the homes were simple, made of concrete and stone.

In Kiryas Joel, Rabinowitz and Dushinsky tried to translate this success stateside. The homes used concrete for the basement and wood and stucco for the rest. This helped them cut their teeth through the 1990s, but they soon moved on to bigger things and into Williamsburg, where they built the \$40 million, six-building Park Plaza condo in South Williamsburg in 2002.

By the late aughts they’d moved into rapidly gentrifying North Williamsburg to build rentals. They raised money from the community as well as some outside investors. Hersh emphasized that Dushinsky puts money into the deals and that Rabsky has never defaulted on any loan. He is cautious about being overleveraged.



Eran Chen

“It’s mainly investors that he’s going project to project with,” said Hersh, without disclosing specifics.

Rabsky’s projects continued to scale over the next decade. The firm’s most well-known building thus far is the Rheingold, a 500-unit rental at 10 Montieth Street in Bushwick, though there have been bigger projects since.

Mastery in development is really mastery in multiple, unrelated skill sets: raising money, courting lenders, assembling land and/or air rights, design, construction, marketing, dealing with the mundane happenings of an office and inspiring staff and managing the properties. Dushinsky, sources say, is one of the rare developers that excels in all of these traits (except, perhaps, press relations). After 10 Monteith, Dushinsky tackled megaprojects.

“He seemed more and more confident,” said Nicholas Liberis of architecture firm Archimaera, who has worked with Rabsky Group.

His largest project shows it. The firm built an 1,100-unit, eight-building project at the former Pfizer site in South Williamsburg’s Broadway Triangle.

All of Rabsky’s projects use the firm’s construction arm. Dushinsky knows what he can build and how long it will take and pushes his subcontractors to deliver. Communication travels in a direct path without middlemen. Dushinsky can also be forceful when negotiating with subcontractors.

“We have a lot better handle on pricing,” said Hersh. “When you are on top of your game and taking care of the project yourself it usually goes a lot faster to build and finish.”

Robyn Sorid of G4 Capital, a lender to Rabsky on its 604-unit rental building at 313 Bond Street in Gowanus, said that “they always perform really well in terms of construction schedule.”

“In New York City construction there will be delays,” she added. “They do a really good job of managing that.”

The battle of North Brooklyn

Rabsky wasn't the only upstart developer with roots in the Hasidic community and splashy Williamsburg projects that was on the rise in the 2010s.

Yoel Goldman and his firm, [All Year Holdings](#), have a trajectory that could seem similar. The mercurial Goldman also hailed from South Williamsburg and built his own empire in North Brooklyn, valued at over \$1 billion. Dushinsky, who comes from the Vishnitz community, and Goldman, from the Satmar sect, drew obvious comparisons. Both were doing multiple mega-projects at once, even using the same architect and the same lenders.

“Goldman tried to copy [Dushinsky] in the way that his operation was set up,” said one person familiar with both developers.

But Goldman got hooked on leverage, raising hundreds of millions on the Israeli bond market and cutting handshake deals with other investors from the community.

When Covid hit, Goldman's [house of cards came tumbling down](#). He faced one lawsuit after the next and was accused of misreporting information to bondholders. He was forcibly removed from his firm and All Year's properties were sold. Goldman was banned from raising money in Israel for five years, though a High Court judge there said this summer that Goldman will not be criminally prosecuted.

Dushinsky played the long game.

Sources note Rabsky is conservative with its underwriting, shuns higher-cost mezzanine financing and has not lost a project to foreclosure. Rabsky also does not take on outside partners.

“He's the opposite of Yoel Goldman, who turned out to be a shyster,” said one developer. But Rabsky is not without controversy.

Tenant groups have protested Rabsky's management arm, Goose Property Management, which is run by Isaac Rabinowitz's son-in-law. More recently, tenants have complained about non-stop construction at the Bevel in Long Island City.

“It’s like a prison. We are going insane,” one tenant told QNS.com in October.
“I’m a very, very busy guy.” Simon Dushinsky

Another tenant alleged Goose Property never provided legally required stove knob centers, Brooklyn Paper [reported](#). Negative reviews pop up on Google and Yelp, many citing the company’s lack of communication with tenants.

In 2015, the investigative news outlet ProPublica [found](#) that Rabsky violated rent-stabilization laws by illegally overcharging rents on rent-stabilized apartments at the Driggs.

“It is clear that this unscrupulous landlord is violating rent-stabilization laws,” then-New York City public advocate Letitia James told the outlet.

But tenant complaints against developers and management firms are common. There appears to be just one active lawsuit against the duo personally, brought by a subcontractor who is seeking at least \$453,000 for unpaid labor and materials at 10 Montieth Street.

Dushinsky does not worry about it.

“I’m a very busy guy and I didn’t put so much effort into even think on this type of lawsuit,” he said in a deposition in 2023.

Taking Fort Lauderdale

His home market mastered, Dushinsky now enters new territory: Florida.

“We were just looking for opportunities and liked everything we saw in Fort Lauderdale,” said Schlesinger, who notes he has a vacation home in the area.

But Fort Lauderdale is no Williamsburg. It is a place that is famously uncool, a destination for spring breakers who can’t afford Cancun and Northeastern suburbanites who want to golf year-round. Private equity and tech companies who have opened offices in Miami have shunned Fort Lauderdale.

The city’s skyline was equally as unexciting. Its tallest buildings were largely boxy office towers. Downtown’s most famous tenants were AutoNation, and Scott Rothstein, an attorney who was convicted of running a \$1.2 billion Ponzi scheme out of his Fort Lauderdale-based law firm.

But in the last few years, luxury developers like Related Group and [Kushner Companies](#) have flocked to the area. Schlesinger said the chance to reshape the city’s skyline is part of the appeal.

“We believe we are going to take Fort Lauderdale to the next level in terms of the quality of the architecture and of the building itself,” said Schlesinger.

Dushinsky and Schlesinger created Dependable Equities in 2019 and will build two projects in Fort Lauderdale. One is the Ombelle, consisting of two 43-story condo towers with 775 units and 932 parking spaces. Both towers sit on podiums then rise with slight curves that make the buildings appear as if they are expanding. Another tower is even more unusual: the 47-story 633 3rd Avenue will have a futuristic cylindrical design. It’s hard to find a similar build outside of space operas.

“We’ve realized that shaping apartments with a tubular front facade allows for a wider perspective and views, while creating very efficient layouts,” said Chen, the ODA architect. “Each room has its own rounded front and putting them next to each other creates a tubular vertical expression unlike anything else we have seen or done before.”

Both projects are in [Flagler Village](#), an area that has drawn hopeful comparisons to Miami’s Wynwood neighborhood with its funky restaurants and bars.

“If we had this conversation maybe even five years ago, most people probably wouldn’t take this seriously, to build that 50-story apartment building,” said Jaime Sturgis of Native Realty, a Fort Lauderdale-based commercial brokerage. “It’s come a long way in a short period of time.”

The bet that Flagler Village will become Williamsburg is a bold one, mostly because of the supply equation.

Being the best non-institutional developer in Brooklyn is not necessarily enough. If you can get through zoning and build a new apartment complex in New York City, high demand and low supply guarantee your apartments will fill up.

Building in Fort Lauderdale doesn’t come with such complexity or assurances. You have to actually market your properties.

For a firm like Related Group, expansion to such a different environment might be normal. But other developers based in South Williamsburg, like Zelig Weiss, Yoel Goldman and Joel Gluck, have remained in New York or New Jersey where they have market knowledge of their backyards. Building ground-up with three skyline-altering designs in a new market without institutional money is risky.

Dushinsky has approvals to build all three of his towers. But speculation swirled that he would sell the sites after gaining the needed zoning. The designs seem too fantastical and out of place for the city.

Visionaries have long pitched South Florida as the future. But the future never seems to arrive. Take the city of Miami's bold venture into cryptocurrency, or Elon Musk's plan to build magical underground tunnels in Fort Lauderdale, or even a plan to connect Miami and Miami Beach by monorail.

But Dushinsky could be the one to actually deliver. Dushinsky, whose first language is Yiddish and whose schooling was the Yeshiva system, has outsmarted and outbuilt Brooklyn developers with prestigious backgrounds, Ivy League degrees and REBNY board seats. Maybe he is the one who can conquer this unlikely second city, to etch his name in Fort Lauderdale like Related Group did in Miami or [Dezer](#) did on Sunny Isles.

"He's committed. He wants to expand his business and not be in all one place," said Hersh. "He wants to be a serious player there."

A previous version of this story used an old figure for units and parking spaces at the Ombelle.