

'Instant Room' Installed Through the Roof

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Dangling on hook of a large crane, pre-assembled kitchen and bathroom unit is hoisted over East Fifth Street on Lower East Side in "instant rehabilitation" demonstration.



Moments later, unit is lowered toward roof of the building for which it is destined, an unoccupied old-law tenement in which a hole has been made from the roof down.

Experiment Testing New Rehabilitation Methods Here

By STEVEN V. ROBERTS

A giant crane swung a pre-assembled kitchen and bathroom unit through a hole in the roof of a five-story old-law tenement on the Lower East Side yesterday. Within an hour workmen had bolted it into place and would have had it ready for use except for the plumbers' strike.

The job was part of a progress report on "instant rehabilitation" — an experiment that aims at cutting the time for renovation of a slum building to 48 hours.

When the experiment began last April the plan was to test new materials and rehabilitation techniques on two unoccupied tenements at 633 and 635 East Fifth Street. Conrad Engineers, the California company that is conducting the experiment said it would be ready for the 48-hour trial on No. 637 in midsummer.



The four-month strike of construction plumbers and other delays have set back the final trial until February or March, according to Edward Rice, president of Conrad Engineers.

When the glistening bathrooms and kitchens were installed yesterday at No. 635, structural defects in the 70-year-old tenement caused the unit to rest at least an inch above the existing floor.

This seemed to symbolize the consensus among housing experts on "instant rehabilitation"—that it is a promising experiment that has produced some, but by no means all, of the answers to the problem of renovating slum housing.

Moreover, the experts believe, it should be only the beginning of an intensified research program to find better technical and financial tools to produce decent housing in the country's slum areas.

Mr. Rice noted that many construction materials had been tested in the first building. The tenement now contains vinyl floors that require no refinishing for 10 years, ceramic bathroom tiles that stick together without liquid cement and wall-board that is so tough that workmen had trouble cutting holes in it for electric wiring.

Expandable windows that adapt to the irregular shapes of the old window frames have been installed. Garbage chutes lead into a Swedish device that compresses the refuse, disinfects it, and even sprays it with perfume.

Two one-bedroom and one three-bedroom apartment will be built on each floor of the tenement buildings. The average development cost will be about \$13,000 an apartment, Mr. Rice estimated, as opposed to about \$23,000 for new construction.

"There is such a tremendous need for better housing in New York that it is worth rehabilitating these tenements," he said. He asserted that the cost of demolishing the city's 43,000 old-law tenements—those built before 1901, with minimal standards for ventilation and sanitary facilities—would be prohibitive.

Housing experts are debating

whether old-law tenements are worth rehabilitating. Peter L. Abels, housing director for Mobilization for Youth, an anti-poverty program, praised the current experiment but said he "seriously questions" the wisdom of renovating the tenements on the Lower East Side. They cover 85 per cent of their building lots and front on streets only 60 feet wide.