

New York family

March 2007
Established 1999

| a special place |

Welcome To The Fun House

APPLE SEEDS BRINGS AN IMAGINATIVE KIDS' SPACE TO THE FLATIRON DISTRICT

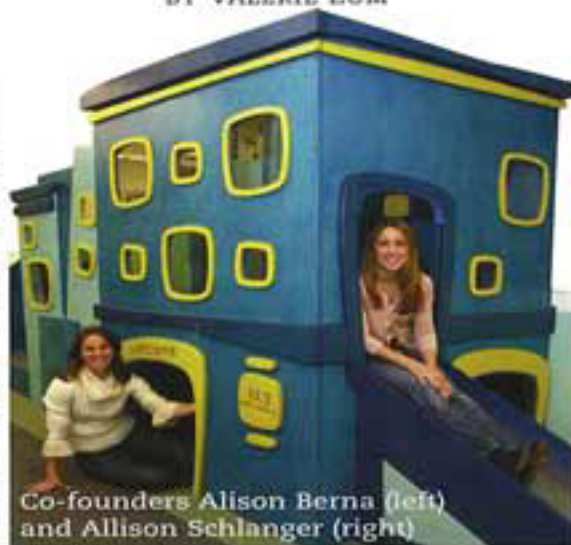
BY VALERIE LUM

Downtown moms Alison Berna and Allison Schlanger first sealed their friendship when they squeezed into an elevator together armed with double strollers on their way to a children's music class. But the two quickly learned they had more in common than just twins.

Berna, who worked for the United Nations Children's Fund, and Schlanger, an Emmy nominated television producer working for MTV Networks, were looking for a career change — one that would bring them closer to their kids. At the same time they were feeling exhausted from the time they did spend with their children, carting them from one side of Manhattan to the other for various kids' activities. Berna says they remember thinking, "Why can't we go to a place where everything is under one roof?"

So the two savvy moms decided to take matters into their own hands. Along with their husbands, Bobby and Craig, Berna and Schlanger used their creative talents to open an original play space in their own neighborhood.

Apple seeds, as it's called, is hardly your average kids' spot. The 15,000 square foot facility on West 25th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue, which just opened in February, offers kids' classes in music, yoga, science, art and more for children up to the age of five. It also boasts a 2,500 square foot state of the art indoor playground with New York City style miniature markets



Co-founders Alison Berna (left) and Allison Schlanger (right)

and jungle gym skyscrapers created by the same designer behind the Children's Museum of Manhattan's new "Playworks" exhibit. And, as if that wasn't enough, there's a family-friendly café, children's boutique selling clothes, toys, books and artwork, and plenty of space for birthday parties.

Berna and Schlanger felt there was a need for a place like apple seeds in their neighborhood. "We feel like there are a few kids' places, but it hasn't caught up to the amount of families here," Schlanger says of the Chelsea and Flatiron districts.

So far, classes have already started filling for the March through May semester.

Creating the facility and its programs is like putting together a big production, says Berna. The two women have developed the facility down to the finest details, including getting dishwasher safe toys for the playgrounds so

that they can be easily disinfected, and having antibacterial gel dispensers in strategic areas to keep germs at bay. The process has also involved getting down and dirty — Berna and Schlanger could be seen sweeping and dusting once the space had been constructed to make sure it was ready for opening day.

As for the name, it's meant to signify the Big Apple as well as their philosophy about kids: if you plant a seed and tend to it, incredible things can grow. But ultimately the final decision came down to the founders' children. "Before we knew it, our kids were running around saying, 'apple seeds, apple seeds, apple seeds,' and just like that, it was decided," says Schlanger.

Schlanger, who previously also spent eight years as a volunteer teacher at a West Harlem elementary school teaching conflict resolution to 3rd through 5th graders, is ecstatic to be able to provide all sorts of kid activities under one roof. Berna said it's been a big transition from working for children on a global scale with UNICEF to working on a much more local scale with apple seeds, and she couldn't be more thrilled.

"I can't wait to be surrounded by three-year-olds," says Berna. "To see kids grow from being an infant all the way to kindergarten." ♦

10 West 25th Street, 212-792-7590,
www.appleseedsnyc.com