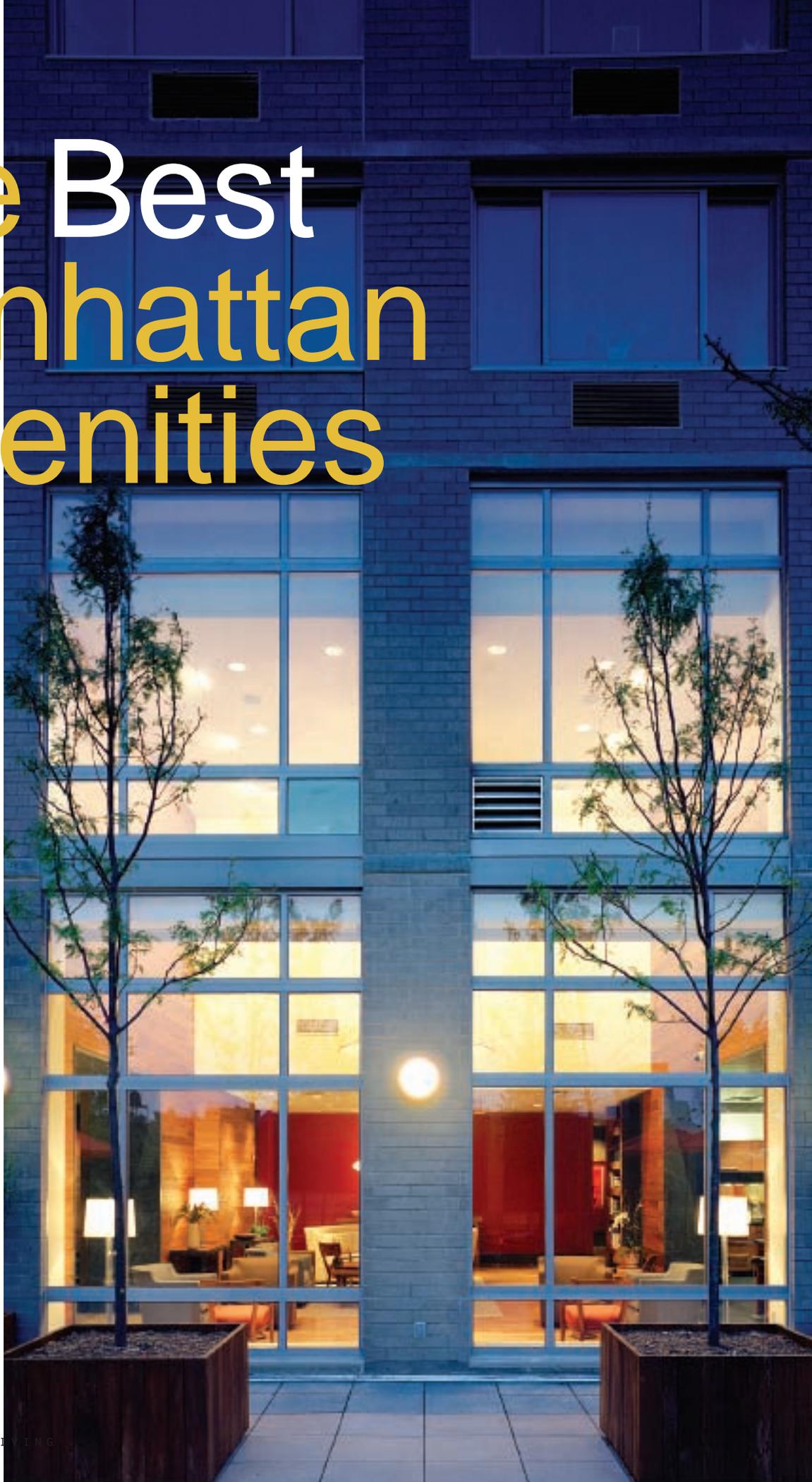


# The Best Manhattan Amenities





**BY STEVE CUTLER**

**Above right: Inside the exclusive Masa restaurant at the Time Warner Center at Columbus Circle.**

**Left: Lobby of the Biltmore a rental building at 271 West 47th Street.**

**A**riving home after a long day at work you want to reward yourself with a brilliant supper, but you don't feel like getting dressed to go out. What can you do?

Call room service, of course. Have an elegant feast assembled by Jean-Georges, Gray Kunz, Thomas Keller, Charles Trotter, or Masa Takayama rolled up to your door. And after dinner think about taking the elevator to the spa to relax by the pool while gazing through glass curtains onto breathtaking views of the Hudson River.

Oh, sorry, you don't live at the Time Warner Center? Do not despair. Virtually all luxury-minded new developments, from condominium towers to boutique loft buildings to elite rental projects, are outdoing each other to spoil residents with over-the-top amenities and services. And already established buildings are upgrading facilities to make sure their residents are not left wanting.

"Everybody is trying to come up with something that's going to make their project a shining star," according to Diane Ramirez, president of Halstead Realty. "Developers are asking, 'How can I offer hotel services without the exorbitant monthly carrying charges?' They make you feel like you're in a five-star hotel, but it's your home and you're not paying the charges of a true hotel apartment."

The five-star treatment begins at sunup, with continental breakfast. At the Ritz-Carlton and 515 Park Avenue for example, says Ramirez, "you can come down in the morning and enjoy a cup of coffee and a muffin while watching the news or reading The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal." Another very civilized ritual making apartment dwellers feel like they live at the Plaza is the afternoon high tea.



**Top: The lounge at the Biltmore.**

**Above: Michael Morris, founder of Concierge Service International.**

“Lifestyle” is the operative word today, and the one to see about keeping yours New York City—rich is the concierge. The 2004 concierge is an entirely new model, a combination valet, personal assistant, social director, travel agent, and know-it-all savvy New Yorker.

Says Lauren Stender, designer for Kenneth Cole, “I call him for anything and everything,” referring to Michael Morris, founder of Concierge Service International, an outfit contracted to serve tenants of the Gotham Organization’s luxury rental buildings.

Stender has been in the city just under a year, and, she says, “All my friends have lived here about as long as I have. There’s nobody to call.” So she rings Morris most every week, for everything from “Oh no, it’s 5:00 and I’m leaving for a business trip tomorrow and I have to go right now to a place that’s open Sunday to buy a little blow dryer” to scoring fresh rhubarb to make pie.

“I went out to Gristedes and D’Agostinos,” she reports. No rhubarb. “So I called Michael and said I need this right now, where can I get it? He called me right back, said the Amish Market has some—they can deliver it or you can pick it up. Or if you want a bigger selection, there’s Whole Foods. He always gives you more than one option.”

Every new Gotham tenant gets a welcome package and personal call from Morris before they move in. “I ask them if there’s anything they need,” he says, “like moving companies, furniture, or to get their walls painted.” Once they move in they’re encouraged to call or email anytime for any reason.

Thomas Strehle, an H.R. director for Charles Schwab, lived at Gotham’s Atlas building and became so accustomed to having a personal assistant, he kept the service, paying the yearly rate of \$3,000 when he bought a place in Chelsea. “I’ve called Michael to cater parties, told him, ‘I get home at 6:00 and want sushi served at 6:30.’ I’ve gotten second-row center Hairspray tickets, third-row center Cher at the last minute. And if I have unexpected guests Morris will secure a maid at the last minute.”

“In New York,” says Morris, “anybody can get a restaurant reservation, but it might not be the night you want to get it or the time you want to get it.” It’s all who you know, and Morris makes it his business to know key staff at all the better restaurants and nightclubs. If residents want to go to Show Nightclub, “Friday nights I put my clients on a list, so there’s no line, no cover charge—they just walk right in.” Instant cachet.

### The Social Whirl

Gotham's concierge program keeps its large number of single tenants active, offering yoga and kickboxing, sushi parties, movie screenings on the roof in summer, theme parties like the mojito-fueled "Havana Nights," and "pamper days," featuring free manicures and pedicures.

Another elite concierge service, Ben Elliot's Quintessentially, offers anything-and-everything personal assistance to buyers at One Beacon Court, a new luxury condominium on East 58th Street. Phones are manned 24/7 to handle 2 a.m. right now requests. Quintessentially is especially effective for entry into private clubs, fashion shows, film premiers, and arts events. The weekly newsletter is enough to wear out the most intrepid New York culture hound.

### Puttin' on the Ritz

Actual hotel/condominium com-

plexes, such as the Ritz-Carlton, offer personal assistance that's even more attentive. According to Matthew Hall of Millennium Partners, "You have this hotel below you, and its goal is to make your life as simple as possible." For example, he says, "you can call the chef about a recipe, or if you're in the middle of cooking dinner and realize you don't have ginger, call the chef and have a piece delivered." For that matter, have the chef come up to cook dinner in your apartment. "An owner at the Battery Park Ritz-Carlton, an attorney traveling on business, called the hotel, spoke with the concierge, and arranged for a Thanksgiving dinner for 35 people in her apartment. The next day!"

Also, says Hall, "if you're traveling and you forget something, the concierge can access your apartment, go in, and get the shirt or cuff links and have them FedExed to you anywhere. It's like having a butler on an à la carte basis. Second- and third-home owners can



Billiard room at the Biltmore.



**Above: The Core Club for the residents at Park Avenue Place at 55th Street.**

**Below: 5,000 square-foot courtyard garden at the Milan on East 55th Street.**



huge fitness studio; aqua lounge with mineral baths and ice, cascade, and Swiss showers; spa with a long list of treatments; private cabanas; and two lounges. The landscaped outdoor garden terrace offers the most extravagant of 21st century New York amenities: a smoking area.

Some Core Club amenities are extended to residents of Park Avenue Place. For complete access they can apply for membership, which costs \$25,000 to join and \$1,000 per month in dues.

### Up on the Roof

“Every inch of space is being utilized,” reports Adrienne Albert, president of the Marketing Directors, especially rooftops. Black tar has given way to lush landscaping. According to Albert, gardens are turning up “wherever there’s a rooftop, if it’s not too windy. And some developers are talking about putting up windscreens because the views are so breathtaking.”

Courtyard gardens are also becoming more and more elegant and elaborate, often designed by signature architects. Tom Rowe, New York studio head for Michael Graves & Associates, says of the courtyard in his new building, the Impala, “It’s like gold for that building, something you’re completely surprised about. You walk into the building and there’s green past the front desk. You go past the front desk right into the garden.”

Another surprise at the Impala: “Some of the most popular units were small studios that face the courtyard,” says Rowe. These are apartments that look inside the building. “People have been trying to combine them. In New York it’s very unusual. They’ve got great exposure to the sun and a pretty good-size green space.”

Landscape artist Ken Smith, designer of the new roof garden at MoMA, was commissioned to plan the fully enclosed, 5,000 square-foot garden at the Milan on East 55th Street. A veritable private park visible from the lobby, the garden has several dozen bamboo trees lined up in two rows, a lush topiary wall of English ivy, and two paved areas, one for summer activities and the other, a more tranquil green space, for relaxation.

call and say, “We’re coming into town next week, go in and stock my fridge and get some flowers.””

### Give Me Space

New buildings fill whole floors with lavish, amenity-packed common spaces, attracting residents with the promise of never having to leave home for entertainment, exercise, and socializing.

The Biltmore, a luxury rental on West 47th Street, has a 13,000-square-foot, full-floor club operated by American Leisure Corp. containing a fitness center, screening room, lounge with billiards and a fireplace, business center, kitchen with dining area, and wrap-around outdoor sun terrace. The club runs programs such as screenings of *Sex and the City* (including a gala grand finale event) and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, and yoga classes on the outdoor deck.

The Core Club, located in the Park Avenue Place condominium building on East 55th Street, is the ultimate luxury wonderland. Combining high-level concierge service with six floors of amenities, the private club has a 70-seat screening room; a new restaurant by Tom Colicchio; library with business center;

“They make you feel like you’re in a five-star hotel, but it’s your home and you’re not paying the charges of a true hotel apartment.” — Diane Ramirez

### Art as Amenity

Some bold developers are making their buildings distinctive by commissioning art installations. “This is TriBeCa,” says Asi Cymbal, of his new building, River Lofts on Washington Street. “People will live here because of the river, the arts, and the community.” To marry these aspects, the builder hired multimedia artist Robert Ruggieri, president of Art-in-Commerce, to collaborate with interior designer Jay Valgora.

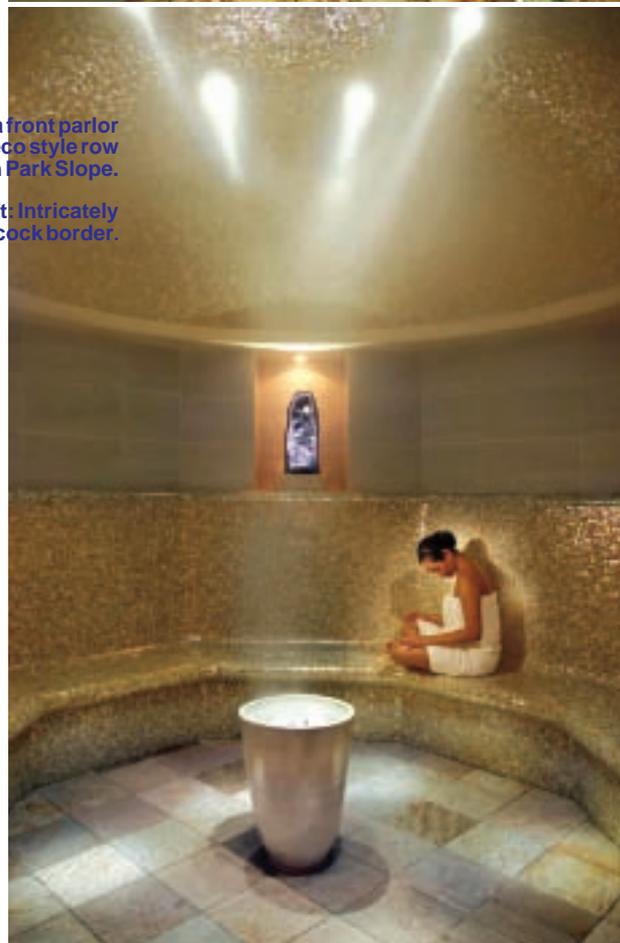
“They wanted to do something with the long corridor that connects the two buildings at River Lofts,” recalls Ruggieri, “something interesting for people walking through.” Two programmable cameras on top of the building will capture the view of the Hudson and the full expanse along the coast, from the Statue of Liberty to the George Washington Bridge. The images will be digitally stylized and projected onto four screens artfully installed into the entryway and corridor structures. Subtle music will complement the images, and inspiring words penned by famous New York writers such as Walt Whitman and Herman Melville might float by.

“When the sun sets,” describes Ruggieri, “the camera will move up and go to the sunset across to New Jersey. On a moonlit night a close-up of the water will capture the reflections. When you see the water, we may process the image—soften it—to look like a Monet painting. Or in the winter we can give it a black-and-white hard edge.” The entryway will be “atmospheric, dreamy, and calm.”

### What About the Kids

The city is awash with children. With young families bucking the suburban-flight trend en masse, buildings are becoming hugely family friendly.

“When I get home from work,” says Richard Lebow, consultant to the World-Wide Group and resident of 50 Murray Street, a luxury rental property, “my son says, ‘Let’s go to the playroom.’” Both are nourished by the interaction there. “For him, there are the other kids,” says Lebow. “He has three or four good friends there. And for me, I know a



xxxxx Inside a front parlor of a Neo-Greco style row house in Park Slope.

Upper Left: Intricately detailed peacock border.

Above and left: The ultimate space to pamper both body and soul: Inside The Mandarin Oriental Hotel Spa at the Time Warner Center.

**On top of the world: The pool at  
The Mandarin Oriental Hotel at the  
Time Warner Center.**



few of the moms and dads. It's a wonderful respite on a rainy weekend. It's like having another room in the house."

The spacious children's playroom is loaded with kid-safe games, soft furniture, easels, and basketball hoops and contains a large plastic playhouse. "My son and his friends climb on the roof and jump down onto one of the bean bags. Little girls tend to go inside and use the tea set." Lebow says the best part is the blackboard, which is used to set up playdates. "We've created a community in the building." And for older kids and adults the building is one of half a dozen in the city featuring a basketball court.

Opus, a new luxury condo going up on Broadway and 107th Street, is creating a mini theme park for kids. "Opusville" will have a theater with a marquee that can be personalized for birthdays and a stage. "Kids love to perform," says developer Veronica Hackett. "We're talking with stage and scene designers and will create a scene backdrop with soft furniture and other pieces. Opusville will also have a library, music room, café section, and science and technology center.

### **Dog Heaven**

New buildings are celebrating New York's love affair with the dog. A call to the concierge at many luxury buildings will

get your dog walked or delivered to a kennel like the New York Dog Spa or Biscuits and Bath, but many go the extra mile: installing on-site pet spas.

"We've created a room with a special tub to bathe pets," says Jane Gladstein, developer of 505 Greenwich, a new condominium just above Canal Street, "with a harness to hold the pet in place. Plus, there's a grooming table, so people can have their groomers or trainers come in and work with their pets."

### **Where Do You Park That Thing?**

Some buildings offer an amenity more precious than gold in New York City: on-site parking. At 195 Hudson Street in TriBeCa, says Stribling agent Siim Hanja, "everybody gets a space in the basement at no extra charge. Downstairs looks like a midtown auto showroom with all late-models, including a \$450,000 Mercedes Maybach." To maintain privacy no one is allowed to rent the space to outsiders. With or without a garage in the building, many luxury developments offer valet parking.

### **Good Things, Small Packages**

With every new luxury development offering soup-to-nuts amenities, boutique buildings are proving they try

harder by providing that same number and quality of services, only shared by fewer apartments. "There's an effort to try to change the ratio as another competitive advantage," according to Stribling V.P. Stan Ponte. For example, says Ponte, "80 Chambers has all the services of a 350-unit building in just 47 apartments. They share a concierge, full-time doorman, kids' playroom, workout rooms, individual storage on each floor, and a conference room."

The conference room has become a standard perk. "More people are working at home. They still have to interact with the outside world, which is hard to do with a Lay's potato chip sitting on the table." Says Ponte, "Here they can call down to the concierge desk, say, 'Tuesday, I'd like to reserve the conference room from 2 to 5.' When the clients arrive there's a doorman to open the door and a concierge to show them to a beautiful conference room with leather executive chairs and modern furniture and art."

### **Come On Down**

As if all the lifestyle perks in their luxury rental buildings weren't enough, the Related Group gives their tenants prizes just for turning in their monthly rent check. Exotic vacations, large-screen TVs, computers, Tourneau watches, Coach bags—you name it. The company allows tenants to pay rent with their American Express cards, with each dollar earning a point toward a prize in the Membership Rewards program. Plus, bonus points are offered for signing and renewing leases. The big-ticket items demand lots of points, but with rents hovering above \$4,000 for a two-bedroom apartment, points accumulate steadily.

Despite the old adage, location hardly matters when everything you need is right within your home. Amenity-rich developments are sprouting up in the most unlikely areas, from Canal Street to far-west Midtown to the Upper West Side above 96th Street. Virtually anywhere in Manhattan these days you can live in a home that gives you anything your heart desires... right now. n