



Hottest Trends in Luxury Living

by Steve Cutler

Small Condos — Big Amenities

As available land is becoming scarcer, many new projects coming to the market are boutique condominiums containing between four and 40 or so apartments. Fewer units doesn't mean less luxury—a wide range of unique amenities are turning these new buildings into the next new trend.

Some notable newcomers are the 23-unit M at Beekman on East 50th Street, the nine-unit Prime on West 14th Street, the seven-unit 441 East 57th Street, the 16-unit 34 Leonard Street, the 41-unit 100 West 18th Street, and the four-unit One 7th on Seventh Avenue South.

"New York City is turning into a European-type market," according to Daren Hornig, developer of The Prime. "It's hard to find sites to build 100,000- to 300,000-square-foot buildings. Developers find bits and pieces."

By sacrificing space for amenities like basketball courts and bowling alleys, boutique residents are amply rewarded in terms of exclusivity and privacy. At The Prime, for example, elevators open directly into the whole-floor apartments.

"The higher-end buyer might want to live in a space that is a little more exclusive," says Jesse Keyes, developer

of One 7th, "not one of those huge boxes with hundreds of people running through the entranceway." Plus, says Keyes, "building on a small scale, I could take a risk in the design, build something beautiful, create a statement, a piece of sculpture." Resting on a triangular piece of land, One 7th contains daring, distinctively angled layouts.

A small building often allows buyers to have extra input in the design. According to John Kully, architect-developer of 441 East 57th Street, "With a boutique project with only seven units we can change the way people buy real estate." Kully says he invites buyers "to come meet the principals and the design team and if you need any deviation in the layout because you happen to have three dogs, or children, or no children, let's work with it."

It's Who You Know

Some new condos have taken branding to a new level, defining their image—and the buyer they want to attract—so precisely that they give it human form. Human celebrity form, that is.



The image of the ultraluxury M at Beekman takes the form of Kelly Killoren Bensimon, model, editor of *Elle Accessories*, author of *American Style* and *The Bikini Book*. Chosen by DMA, a firm that helps match fashion talent with brands, Bensimon is the “curator” of the amenity package for buyers at M, which includes exclusive arrangements with ultra-high-end retailers in the city. The Curated Living package includes Henri Bendel, which invites them to special events after hours and will send over apparel to sample at home; Kenneth Salon at the Waldorf Astoria, which offers a free consultation with the salon’s creative director and subsequent in-home hair cutting and styling and manicure and pedicure; jeweler Mikimoto, which invites residents to special events and collection previews; and L’Artisan Parfumeur, which sends a fragrance specialist to the home and keeps supplies of infusions and candles refreshed automatically.

“The only reason we can do this,” says Sam Sohaili of DMA, “is because we are a boutique with just 20-something units. Kenneth Salon at the Waldorf Astoria couldn’t do this in a hundred-unit building. They have only six stations and their hairdressers are stars.”

Sexy, Hip Twist

District, a new Financial District condo, wears an entirely different image, “perfect for Wall Street,” according to its lifestyle amenity consultant, nightlife impresario Amy Sacco, owner of Bungalow 8 nightclub and author of *Cocktails*. “It’s got a sexy, hip twist to it.” Sacco has taken a penthouse in the building and will open a restaurant there with Stephen Starr of Buddakan and Morimoto fame.



Above and top: The Prime



District will not be the live-in version of a nightclub, she says, but rather a retreat from nightlife, for those who “want a first-class restaurant that delivers, like to train at the gym in the morning, then go to the juice bar, pick up the newspaper. It’s one-stop shopping.”

Healthier Than Thou

One new condominium aiming at the health-conscious consumer has aligned itself not with a person but a store: Whole Foods.

The Element, at 555 West 59th Street, has partnered with Whole Foods and the building’s concierge service, Abigail Michaels, to create a personal shopping service, the Organic Living Program. Residents can shop at Whole Foods online and have deliveries sent to their door or kept in the refrigerated storage in the lobby. They can build a profile with regular deliveries, and keep a credit card on file. The program also offers pick up and delivery from nontoxic Green Apple Cleaners, the only CO2 dry cleaner in the city.

Arty Environs

Many buildings, especially Downtown, in SoHo, TriBeCa, and Chelsea, where they rub up against the artists and galleries, make a grand show of their artistic sensibilities, turning common areas into art exhibition spaces.

At 650 Sixth Avenue, a restoration of an 1892 Beaux Art building in Chelsea, the sales office is not an office but a dramatic art gallery/presentation space, an experiential preview of the modern sculpture and art-infused lifestyle that awaits residents at the condominium.

The building’s white-space lobby will exhibit rotating artwork provided by West Chelsea Gallery owner Jack Shainman, available for purchase.

Another new Chelsea condominium, 100 West 18th Street, intends to make its residents feel aligned with the neighborhood’s explosive art scene. “We’re in talks with a couple of galleries,” says Scott Aaron, director of development, “to have a rotating display of artwork in our lobby. The art community is prominent in Chelsea and people who buy into the building want to be a part of that scene.”

Public spaces at the new Gwathmey Seigel-designed SoHo Mews condominium at 311 West Broadway will display site-specific works of art, including tapestries by Lisa Yuskavage, carpeting by Kiki Smith, installations by Kristin Baker, and sculpture by Keith Edmier. The building will contain a contemporary art gallery maintained by the Art Production Fund.

Not that artistic aspiration is limited to Downtown developers. The Athena Group has commissioned Brooklyn artist Jonathan Cramer to install an experimental work of sculpture, part of his three-dimensional “Shape Matrix” series, at the entrance of 111 Central Park North, a new luxury condominium in Harlem.

“I think art has got to be a trend among the better buildings,” says Athena principal Louis Dubin. “The buyer is more sophisticated now, and as aesthetics gain importance in the new buildings, you need to pay attention to details like the public art.”

Greener Pastures

Battery Park City remains New York’s primary laboratory for environmentally responsible architecture. Two new high-rise condominiums at its northern end, the Visionaire and the Riverhouse, are stunning models of green living.

In addition to energy-conserving systems throughout the building, the Visionaire provides apartments with a

fresh air supply and exhaust system to minimize allergens. Filtered air is heated and humidified in winter and cooled and dehumidified in summer months. And each unit is finished with sustainable and nontoxic materials.

Green residential buildings are sprouting up all over the city: the Kalahari in Harlem, The Harrison on the Upper West Side, The Brompton on the Upper East Side, One Jackson Square in the West Village, and One 7th where the West Village, Greenwich Village, and SoHo meet.

Some buildings are meeting the green trend at least part of the way, like Linden 78, a new Upper West Side boutique condominium at 230 West 78th Street, which boasts custom-designed kitchens by Florense, a green-certified, Brazilian-based cabinet maker.

Trends in Design — Daring Façades

Designers are using everything from black brick to terra cotta to stainless steel and other metals, and novel shapes and colors, to make their buildings distinctive and better functioning. The terra cotta on the façade of 520 West 19th Street, an 11-story condominium designed by architect Annabelle Selldorf, will be a glazed midnight-blue. “I always thought it fascinating to use old craft in a slightly different way,” says Selldorf, who admires terra cotta for its functionality, durability, and three-dimensionality. She uses it also on 200 Eleventh Avenue, a 19-story condominium with a cast gunmetal-glazed terra cotta base.

The Oculus, at 50 West 15th Street, designed by FXFOWLE Architects, also uses terra cotta on the façade, in a warm, almost limestone color, alongside oversize Wausau windows and stainless steel-railed balconies.

Stone is being used on building façades in innovative ways. Architect Winka Dubbeldam displays marble in a new light on V33, a condominium under construction at 33 Vestry Street. By cutting the marble thin, says Dubbeldam, “the stone by day will be translucent on the inside” while presenting a shiny exterior to the outside. “By night, the light from the inside will make it translucent to the outside.”

The Chelsea Stratus, a new 40-story condominium at 101 West 24th Street, designed by SLCE Architects, uses reddish brown cast stone set in raised patterns against the vast lengths of glass on the façade.

Zinc is also making an appearance. The Indigo, a 13-story boutique condominium being built at 125 West 21st Street in Chelsea, uses the metal in a grid pattern to offset the glass in its façade. “Zinc has depth,” says the designer, architect Dan Kaplan of FXFOWLE. “It’s not dull or shiny and doesn’t look like painted metal.”

At 245 Tenth Avenue, an 11-story West Chelsea condominium, architect Jared Della Valle, of Della Valle Bernheimer, uses stainless-steel panels stamped with diamond-faceted patterns mixed with sheets of glass on the façade to reflect the light changing throughout the day.

Paint It Black

Ever since SHoP Architects put black zinc on the façade of



the Porter House in the Meatpacking District, condominiums are turning black all over the city. Another Della Valle Bernheimer façade, on an 11-story boutique condominium at 459 West 18th Street, is proudly painted black.

The FXFOWLE-designed Onyx Chelsea, at 261 West 28th Street, will be clad with black-painted metal panels, and the rear of Jean Nouvel’s 100 Eleventh Street in West Chelsea will have a black brick façade, a striking contrast to the complex glass window display in the front. The exterior of 100 West 18th Street is composed of black iron ore brick.

Trends in Interiors

According to architect Andres Escobar, whose interiors are becoming ubiquitous in new luxury condominiums in the city, “For a long time floors were cherry wood and maple. Then people adopted the dark, more dramatic floors,” especially in TriBeCa and SoHo. “Now they’re switching to bleached woods. There’s a cycle for material choices. Bleached woods were in vogue 15, 20 years ago.”

“Developers are moving toward a much more neutral aesthetic in finishes,” says Fionn Campbell, principal of Chelseek.com, an independent brokerage. In addition to bleached oak floors, says Campbell, “cabinets are neutral oaks.” All in all, he adds, “it’s kind of like the new white box.”

Kitchen cabinets, says Escobar, “use more polyester resins and lacquer—high gloss materials. And with the



111 Central Park North

technology available you're able to render a cabinet a metallic color, whatever color you desire."

According to Karen Fisher of Designer Previews, an architect/designer referral service, while monochromatic color schemes are prevalent, usually beige or another neutral tone, more people are becoming fearless with their colors, combining multiple bright colors in a single scheme. Red rooms are big, she says.

The Disappearing Kitchen

According to Lone Bager of Kobenhavn, a Danish manufacturer of high-end kitchen and bathroom furnishings with a showroom on East Seventh Street, kitchens have been fully integrated into the living area. They have disappeared, in effect. "They are like furniture," says Bager, "with flat

doors and no hardware. There's a lot of white, with marble counters that are also white. All the appliances are integrated and the refrigerator is hidden."

"The biggest change," notes Bager, "is that a few years ago, people didn't really care about what's inside the cabinet. Now you have luxury inside as well. We do everything inside our cabinets, including the drawers, in solid maple."

Escobar says the material of the day for countertops is quartz, a manmade product composed of glass powder and epoxy. "It's very resilient and nonporous and looks like granite. But you get a whole variety of colors you cannot get in granite."

Look for a revolution very soon in interior lighting, says Escobar. "The LED craze is coming. It has great qualities: it doesn't generate heat, it's ecofriendly, and has a much greater life span than any other source of light. And it can change color. You can change your white room to pink, red, or blue with the lighting."

Loving the Technology

"I'm loving the smart-home technology," says Amy Sacco of the tech amenities at District. "I can actually have the restaurant or any kind of deliveries sent to my apartment before I get home, click onto my smart-home technology and set my lights, open my shades, pop on the fireplace, have the wine sent up chilled and ready-to-go from the restaurant downstairs. It's very James Bond."

At 441 East 57th Street, when you use a low-frequency radio wave key fob, says developer John Kully, "the building recognizes you as you move through it. The front door opens as you approach it. There are no buttons to press in the elevator; it just knows who you are." And,



because you've entered instructions into your Blackberry on the way home, when you enter the apartment, "the music and lights have already been turned on and the temperature set for you."

Fiber optic wiring for cable TV and broadband has become standard. The latest trend is preinstalled iPod docks throughout the home. "At View59," says Sarah Burke, VP of sales for The Developers Group, which is marketing the Long Island City condominium, "with the wiring all through your house, anybody who comes over with an iPod can just plug it in."

Apartments at 45 John Street, a new Financial District condo conversion, take it one step further. "We have speakers in the living room and bedroom," says Jim Brawdgers, of Corcoran Group Marketing, "and a control panel adjacent to the dock." When you walk in the front door, you just pull the earbuds from your ears, pop the iPod into the dock, and the music plays on.

Everybody Into the Pool

More new condominiums have swimming pools, from the largest, such as Sheffield 57, Element, Visionaire, and 225 Rector, with its 75-foot, sky-lit pool, so big they talk about it in square feet (4,000), to the more modest, such as Enrique Norton's One York in TriBeCa, Jean Nouvel's 100 Eleventh Avenue, and the Cetra/Rudy-designed 133 West 22nd Street.

Even the boutiques are installing pools, including the 23-unit M at Beekman, with its rooftop "tread pool." And 441 East 57th Street, with just 12 apartments, and 33 Vestry Street, with just seven apartments, have heated pools on the roof. ■



This image and above:
441 East 57th Street