

THE ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER

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Feature> The Way Luxe Looks Now

The floor plans and materials at four new condos say much about contemporary life and values

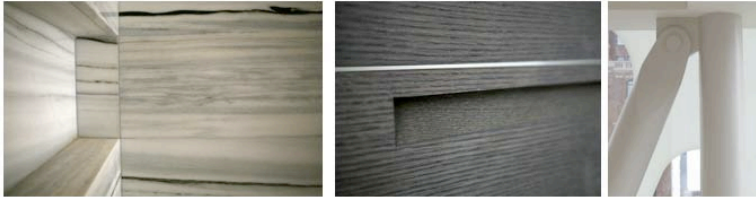


A KITCHEN IN THE WILLIAM BEAVER HOUSE.
COURTESY TSAO & MCKOWN ARCHITECTS

HL23
515-517 West 23rd Street
Neil M. Denari Architects

Julius Shulman's iconic photograph of the cantilevered, night-lit living room of Pierre Koenig's Case Study House #22—two women chatting with the lights of Los Angeles below—captured the essence of postwar modern living, California-style. Time will tell if the luxury perches of HL23 will prove as emblematic of the layered urbanism of 21st-century New York. Still, the Neil Denari-designed, 14-story

building is sure to offer some of the best in-home people watching in the city, with endlessly fascinating views of the people on the High Line, as well as the changing foliage of the linear park, cars passing below, and the ever evolving skyline of far west Chelsea.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BANDS OF MARBLE IN A BATHROOM; NOTCHED KITCHEN CABINETRY; STRUCTURAL STEEL GETS A MORE SINUOUS LOOK THANKS TO FRITTED GLASS; TOWER ON THE HIGH LINE; A TYPICAL LIVING SPACE. [CLICK TO ENLARGE.]

TOM STOELKER/ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER

A freewheeling California spirit echoes through the project's formal and structural dynamism, but also at a top-level, 1,000-square-foot penthouse entertaining room with a three-sided wraparound terrace. Custom 20-foot-long sheets of glass move on mechanized tracks on three sides, removing the boundary between indoor and outdoor living. But while the Case Study houses symbolized an accessible, leisurely lifestyle, the glass box atop HL23 epitomizes luxury living out of reach to all but the very few: There are 12 units. While the views out are sure to captivate potential buyers, the architect and developer have paid equal attention to the details within. Museum-quality white oak hardwood floors have a clear coat finish. Kitchens are outfitted with contrasting charcoal gray-stained wood cabinets with notched pulls instead of hardware, beveled solid surface countertops, and a full complement of high-end appliances, including double ovens and 48-inch refrigerator/freezers. Custom mechanical shades rise from the floor to the ceiling, offering a buffer against voyeurism. The bathrooms are covered in massive slabs of marble, selected for their highly graphic veining (horizontal bands, splatter paint, dramatic book-matching) different in every unit. "I don't like the busy-ness of tile, and all the grout seams," Alf Naman, HL23's developer, told AN on a recent tour. "I love the purity of the slab." A material that has connoted luxury for centuries to the point of cliché, the marble here manages to look brand new.



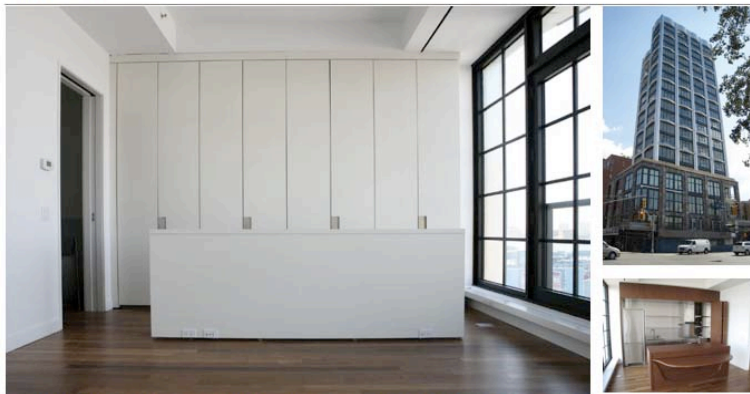
LEFT TO RIGHT: DETAILS OF UNDULATING METAL FACADE FACING THE HIGH LINE AND TWO BATHROOMS WITH STRIATED MARBLE SURROUNDS. [CLICK TO ENLARGE.]

TOM STOELKER/ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER

Rooms are laid out carefully, and so while the public areas are open and free flowing, bedrooms feel private, with bathrooms, closets, and discreet hallways, preventing shared walls. Careful planning extended to minimization of the service core, which Naman credits to architect of record Marc Rosenbaum. "When you can gain 12 inches here or there, it's worth all the effort. It means you can create more generous spaces," Naman said.

When the building is complete, one hopes HL23 will also be photographed to capture how modern New Yorkers—some of them, at least—live now.

Alan G. Brake



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: MASTER BEDROOM WITH ALL-IN-ONE STORAGE/HEAD-BOARD; A TOWER OF DUPLEXES; THE KITCHEN WITH FOLD-AWAY BREAKFAST TABLE. [CLICK TO ENLARGE.]

TOM STOELKER/ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER

The 16-unit condominium at 200 Eleventh took a long time to be completed, and not just because of the garage elevator that delivers cars directly to each apartment. Begun in 2006, there were stop-work orders, developer splits, media mauling, the usual residential real-estate mayhem, and then the economy collapsed. Now, with all four penthouses and the 2,400 square feet on average apartments—duplexes all—sold, the 19-story condominium designed by Annabelle Selldorf still looks impressively au courant.

That enduring freshness is thanks in part to the refined modern classicism that Selldorf practices. But it is also the result of her thorough understanding of the floor plan. At a time when it is fashionable to undermine expectations, throw in some curved walls, tight angles, and perhaps a window too high to reach, Selldorf has remained resolutely straightforward: "Maybe I am old-fashioned, but I am obsessed with floor plans. Others work on sections or 3D; I can't visualize without a plan. It allows me to think about how to walk through and use a space—and that's the beginning of everything."



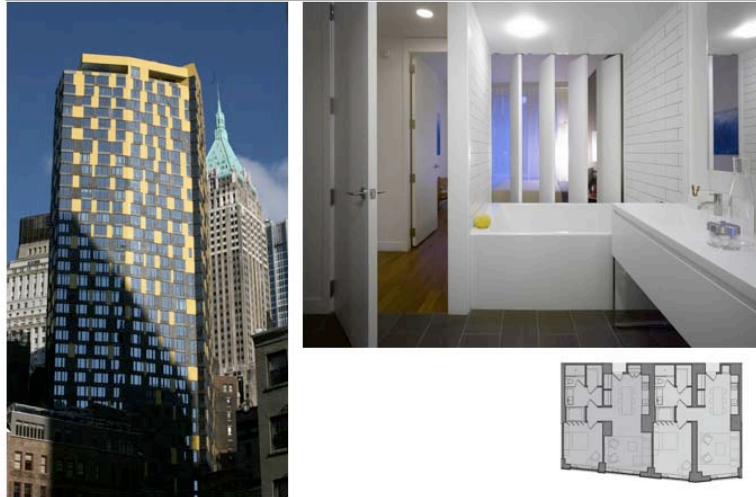
LEFT TO RIGHT: DETAIL OF A FOLD-AWAY TEAK BREAKFAST TABLE; LAVA STONE WALL TILES IN BATHROOM; GRANITE TUB; EXAMPLE FLOOR PLAN. [CLICK TO ENLARGE.]

TOM STOELKER/ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER

Selldorf makes spaces understandable in terms of everyday life—there is a place to hang a coat on entering, guests can go to a powder room without barging through a guest or children's bedroom. She arrives at her floor plans, she said, using furniture layouts, and imagining lives as they unfold: How would 12 people sit around the table. How would someone eat alone? "It's layered work, perhaps even pedestrian—but I go over and over it until it is all worked out." The master bedroom, for instance, is surprisingly, impressively small. More bulkhead than the baronial sprawl associated with luxury condominiums, it is efficient, with a freestanding piece serving as both storage and headboard. (Mind you, there's also a view to the horizon of the Hudson River, plus, for some, perhaps a double-height terrace). The apartments are assumed to be, as with so many new luxury dwellings these days, pied-à-terres, and Selldorf addresses that reality in plan, putting her emphasis on the grand two-story living space, allowing bedrooms to be utilitarian and the kitchen to disappear entirely behind folding walls.

Materials distinguish the bathroom, and here Selldorf admits succumbing to some "outlandish" indulgences. The freestanding tub is made of granite ("Everyone knows the Corian tub, so I wanted one in stone"); the walls are big slabs of lava ceramic—difficult to install, visually intriguing, beautifully tactile, and well worth the effort. Overall, materials—and especially the (sustainably sourced) teak used for the floors, kitchen counters, and stair risers—convey the message of a classic calm that will remain timely for as long as luxury means quality. And then there are those personal garages.

Julie V. Iovine



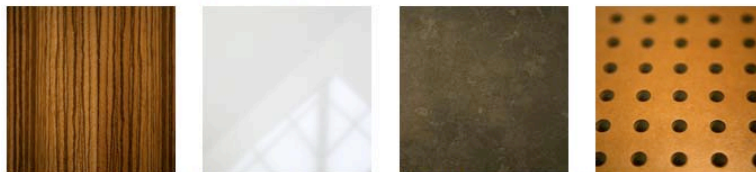
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: THE CHARCOAL GREY AND TAXI YELLOW TOWER; THE PEEK-A-BOO BATHROOM WITH LOUVERS; AND TWO EXAMPLE UNITS. [CLICK TO ENLARGE.]

COURTESY TSAO & MCKOWN ARCHITECTS

William Beaver House
15 William Street
Tsao & McKown Architects

Nix the dining room. Hide the kitchen. Expand the bathroom and add a tub that seats four. Now that's a pad. But is it luxury? Calvin Tsao of Tsao & McKown suggests that the definition of contemporary luxury responds to time and place. And the firm's design for the William Beaver House is luxury of a very distinct time and a very particular place. Conceived before the 2008 crash, the condo is a two-minute walk from Wall Street, and was originally intended for hedge-funders on the move.

Tsao says that the notion of what makes a home in New York is as diverse as the city itself. "People are finally shedding some of the romantic notions of home," he said. "To me, in some ways, it's a lament. There's something wonderful about classic design, but we have to stay modern and real, more pragmatic. We investigate urban living instead of 'homes.'" Tsao noted that for the William Beaver customer, the concealed kitchen is for reheating takeout, dining rooms are superfluous, and the bathroom is a place to relax. "We're talking about a youthful population that is not necessarily family-oriented," he said. "It's all very Holly Golightly, the oven is where you keep your sweaters."



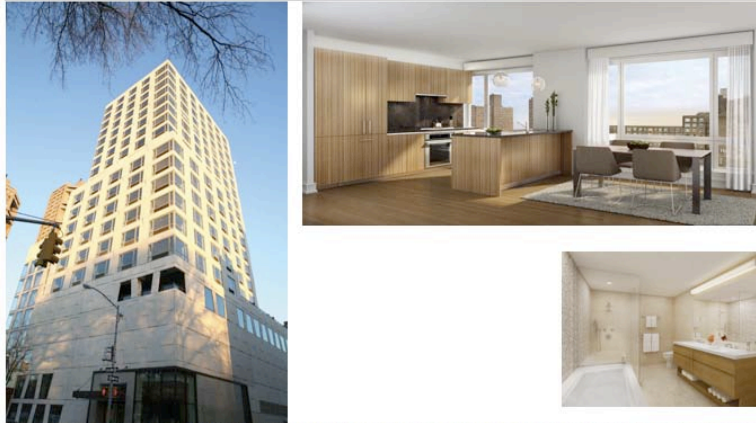
LEFT TO RIGHT: TIGER WOOD IN THE LOBBY; WHITE LACQUER KITCHEN CABINETS; CAESARSTONE KITCHEN BACKSPLASH; PERFORATED PANELS. [CLICK TO ENLARGE.]

TOM STOELKER/ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER

While it may sound extravagant, Tsao believes the reality is that there's some serious value engineering and programmatic typologies at work: If a formal dining room isn't going to be used, then scrap it and give the space over to the bathroom. There, the notion of privacy is challenged with vertical louver doors that open onto the bedroom. "We're not visionaries; we did focus groups," the architect said. "People need time and a place to relax. By opening onto the bedroom, we steal visual space. You don't need to be sequestered."

While load-bearing walls would have conserved costs, the designers engineered the building to allow for break-through walls, in case future owners want to expand into the next apartment. Burmese teak accents are used throughout in the flooring, on a kitchen butcher block, and lining the workstation hidden inside a closet. The workstation can be easily removed should the owner care to use it for clothing. "We insert moments that can be augmented," said Tsao. Elsewhere, elements of classic New York nudge their way in. The glazed yellow and charcoal brick of the facade is inspired by NYC taxicabs, while a wider version of subway tiles (4-inch-by-16-inch) line the bathroom. "I do believe the city exudes a certain kind of character, and it's important to reflect that," said Tsao. "Importing a Zen look with bamboo would be a little artificial."

Tom Stoelker



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: THE TOWER; RENDERING OF TYPICAL LIVING ROOM; RENDERING OF TYPICAL BATHROOM. [CLICK TO ENLARGE.]

COURTESY ANDRE KIKOSKI ARCHITECT

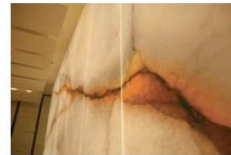
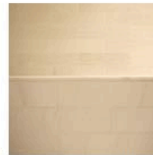
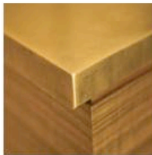
1280 Fifth Avenue
 Andre Kikoski Architect with SLCE Architects and Robert A.M. Stern Architects

The interiors of 1280 Fifth Avenue, a 19-story residential tower atop the Robert A.M. Stern–designed Museum for African Art, are more inspired by Central Park’s Harlem Meer than by Museum Mile. Working with architect of record SLCE, Kikoski portioned out the tower’s floor plans to preserve park views through large picture windows, taking care that interior elements don’t distract from them.

The apartments are, in fact, organized looking outward. Renewable materials, wrought from a variety of finishes and scales, were chosen to evoke the park across the street. Permanent fixtures and finishes evoke the outdoors, too: Flooring is 5-inch-wide white oak, except in the bathrooms where Jerusalem limestone floors surround Zuma soaking tubs. Bathroom finishes are meant to remind buyers that “this building is carefully designed for today’s lifestyles, but is also adjacent to a great repository of natural, organic beauty,” said Kikoski. Bianco Dolomiti marble counters top American black walnut vanities, and tiny abalone-shell wall tiles add texture to the walls of glass-enclosed showers.

The centerpiece of most units, kitchens with teak millwork and brown Labrador granite, are designed as fully integrated pieces of furniture with name-brand appliances hidden so as not to upstage the scenery. In the case of at least one north-facing studio, the kitchen, just steps from the bed, looks more like a custom-designed wardrobe than like a place to cook.

“Take any trophy building on Park Avenue,” said Kikoski. “The kitchen is sequestered away, it’s more for servants—it’s not anything you want to see or really ever go into. Here, the kitchen is at the center of the living experience.”



LEFT TO RIGHT: A TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN; HAMMERED METAL ON THE LOBBY CONCIERGE DESK; ABALONE-SHELL BATHROOM WALL TILES; PHOTO MURAL OF MARBLE IN THE LOBBY. [CLICK TO ENLARGE.]

TOM STOELKER/ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER

However stuffy, traditional designs were more forgiving to architects than new open-plan layouts and full-height windows. “The walls were thick, materials were hefty, and people didn’t have as much stuff,” said Kikoski. “Now, people want outrageously spacious bathrooms with huge walk-in closets and kitchens with tons of square footage. There’s a lot of careful precision and calibration required to capture these elements and to make them gracious within these incredibly engineered environments.”

Challenged with anticipating how residents will wish to use their space, and with leaving them as many options as possible, Kikoski presented building manager Brown Harris Stevens with ideas for horizontal and vertical unit combinations, should the right buyer come along. The building’s 116 apartments run between \$750,000 to over \$3.3 million, but combination units are listed at up to \$6.9 million, not including construction costs. “We thought of the great rooms as the equivalent of the Great Lawn,” said Kikoski. “You can use them however you want.”

Jennifer K. Gorsche