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Story



OBJECTS OF DESIGN

JUST ADD BUYERS: HAUTE CONDOS HAVE LIVED-IN VIBE

By KATHERINE DYKSTRA

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AT Manhattan House, the block-long, 20-story rental-to-condo conversion of the 1952 Gordon Bunshaft-designed building at 200 E. 66th St., the sales team has turned up its collective nose at the plain Jane, Ikea-furnished, stark and sterile model apartment and decided to do things a bit differently.

"We didn't want to just do a boring model," says Prudential Douglas Elliman vice chairman Dolly Lenz, director of sales at Manhattan House. "We wanted to interpret how Grace Kelly would have lived here."

Specifically, Manhattan House, in a collaboration with Princess Grace Foundation-USA, asked four renowned interior designers - Campion Platt, Jamie Drake, Alexa Hampton and Maureen Footer - to each design a model apartment in the spirit of Kelly, a onetime tenant in the building. The idea was to give the apartments a lush, lived-in feeling - down to details such as books on the bookshelves, framed pictures and clothes in the closets.

"A lot of people don't know how to start from a blank slate," Lenz says. "Where does the couch go? It's about vision, making an easier sale."

The designer units at Manhattan House (which is selling its 400-plus one- to five-bedroom units for \$1,500 to \$2,600 per square foot) are the natural next step in the evolution of the apartment as designer showcase.

The trend started to take hold when Esquire magazine designed a model apartment in Trump World Tower in 2003. The magazine has since designed a unit every year. This year, with the help of such bachelor-friendly brands as Hugo Boss and St. Pauli Girl, and designers including the Rockwell Group and Clodagh, Esquire turned the 4,000-square-foot penthouse apartment at 111 Central Park North into the "ultimate bachelor pad."

Now, at 10 West End Ave., four more Hearst magazines - Country Living, Veranda, House Beautiful and O at Home - have each employed designers to work on a model unit: Annie Selke, Barclay Butera, Celerie Kemble and the editors at O at Home, respectively. Though the building was already mostly sold - only 15 of the 173 condos, which run around \$1,535 to \$1,700 per square foot, remain on the market - the four designer units, which were opened for prospective buyers late last month, increased buyer fervor.

A couple of weeks ago, the building hosted a party in the designer digs for those who had already purchased in the building. One buyer was so smitten with the O at Home unit that she is "seriously considering buying it." Again, she already owns in the building.

"It's tempting to buy them as is. You can move in and not think about another thing," says Corcoran Sunshine Marketing's Loretta Bradbury, the sales director at 10 West End Ave.

The woman interested in the O at Home apartment would likely keep both units.

"But the premium on the apartment ... it is a bit more costly than we originally thought it would be, so I don't have a deal yet," Bradbury adds.

By premium, she means the additional cost of the accoutrements, of which O at Home's is \$250,000. Selke's is \$175,000, Butera's is \$415,000, and Kemble's is \$890,000.

But sometimes buyers just want to create their own dream home. The penthouse at 111 CPN sold, but it wasn't a bachelor who bought it. In fact, the unit was purchased for \$8.5 million by a couple with adult children. And the Esquire design wasn't a factor.

"I sold the apartment before the Esquire event," says Jeff Berger, director of sales at 111 CPN, which has 12 of its 47 condos left. "It was a client I had been working with for six months, and I just got him to pull the trigger a week before."

Before the couple moves in, Esquire will have to remove all of its decor.

"We include it within the price, but my buyer wants our standard finishes instead," says Berger. "They're a little more traditional rather than contemporary."

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