

HOME + DESIGN

# DEPARTURES

Fall 2017

**STEP RIGHT IN**

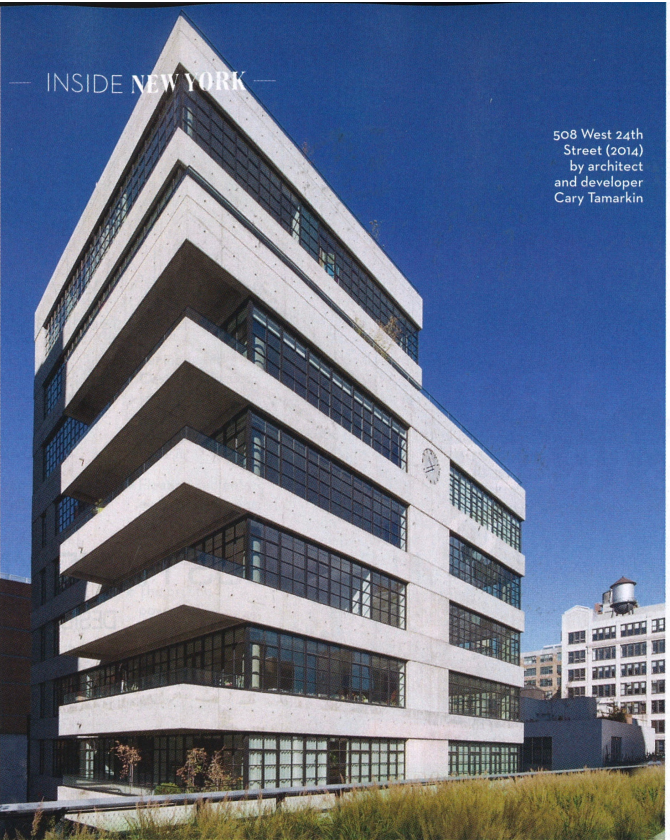
Perfection in Paris

Michael S. Smith  
Takes Malibu

The Insider's Guide  
to New York







— INSIDE NEW YORK —

508 West 24th Street (2014)  
by architect  
and developer  
Gary Tamarkin

REAL ESTATE

# IF YOU WANT SOMETHING DONE RIGHT

Introducing the new breed of architect-developer

by DAVID SOKOL

**V**intage New York apartments test the limits of human patience—cramped rooms, ovens conscripted into sweater storage, Rube Goldberg air-conditioning. But if you equate newly constructed luxury housing with up-to-the-minute design and headache-free living, think again. In the latest condo boom, lawsuits have been filed against developers for flaws like misrepresented ceiling heights and all manner of uninsulated pipes and windows.

There's at least one class of new condominium tower, though, in which meticulous design and construction are givens. Inside the 42-unit Dumbo condo One John Street, motorized triple-glazed windows form a monastic seal against Manhattan Bridge traffic and knife-edged Basaltina kitchen countertops render competitors' marble slabs as run-of-the-mill opulence. Meanwhile, near the High Line, the poured-concrete structure of 508 West 24th Street is sculptural effect.

What these and other projects have in common is not a Pritzker Prize winner or stratospheric price tag, but a business model. All were realized by development firms where architects run the show. "Architects loathe compromise," explains Leonard Steinberg, president of insta-Goliath brokerage Compass. To these companies, softening a misplaced mechanical system is anathema and signing off on mismatched flooring is a sin. In this very small circle of developers, most of whom trained and practiced as architects to start, becoming one's own client promised more creative

control. "Something wasn't quite right," Alex Barrett recalls of his original career. "Program, budget, and site are all enormously important design decisions that get made before an architect is even involved." After moving to a Brooklyn brownstone, the architect founded Barrett Design in 2005 to fill a gap in the local high-end market—and oversee even the most preliminary choices in that process. Currently his firm is constructing three developments in his home borough and breaking ground on its first Manhattan building, in NoHo.

Cary Tamarkin, who sowed the seeds of this movement in 1994, calls being an architect-developer a balancing act. "I won't do a building that doesn't aspire to leave the city better than how I found it," he says, but "I'm very interested in making money." Tamarkin built 508 West 24th

Street, and his namesake firm is completing a Bauhaus-inspired gem at 550 West 29th Street.

Tamarkin jokes that having any kind of architectural value system "may cut out 90 percent of our potential audience." Experts in selling the product disagree. Consumers increasingly view myriad listings and high prices through the filter of authorship, according to James Lansill, senior managing director of the Corcoran Group's development arm, Corcoran Sunshine. "Buyers are taking time to do due diligence," he notes, "and architect-developer properties hold up to their scrutiny." Douglas Elliman Development Marketing president and CEO Susan de França adds, "People gravitate toward the passion and responsibility of architect-developers. They trust they are going to get what was promised." ♦

## Brokers on Speed Dial

While New York's high-stakes real estate market has transformed brokers into TV stars, doing business in the city still relies on returning phone calls and braving open houses. The top-selling salespeople balance the demands of peacocking with old-fashioned dependability.

▶ **ROBBY BROWNE**  
**Corcoran Group**  
His celebrity clients include Uma Thurman and lensman Albert Watson. 212-893-1728; corcoran.com.

▶ **LEONARD STEINBERG**  
**Compass**  
Fast-paced South African and former fashion designer. 646-780-7594; theleonardsteinbergteam.com.

▶ **RAPHAEL DE NIRO**  
**Douglas Elliman**  
Son of Robert and No. 1 closer of new development sales in 2016. 212-460-0655; deniroteam.elliman.com.

▶ **NORMA-JEAN CALLAHAN**  
**Corcoran Sunshine**  
220 Central Park South dynamo now responsible for big-deal Waterline Square. 212-772-2722; corcoransunshine.com. ♦

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