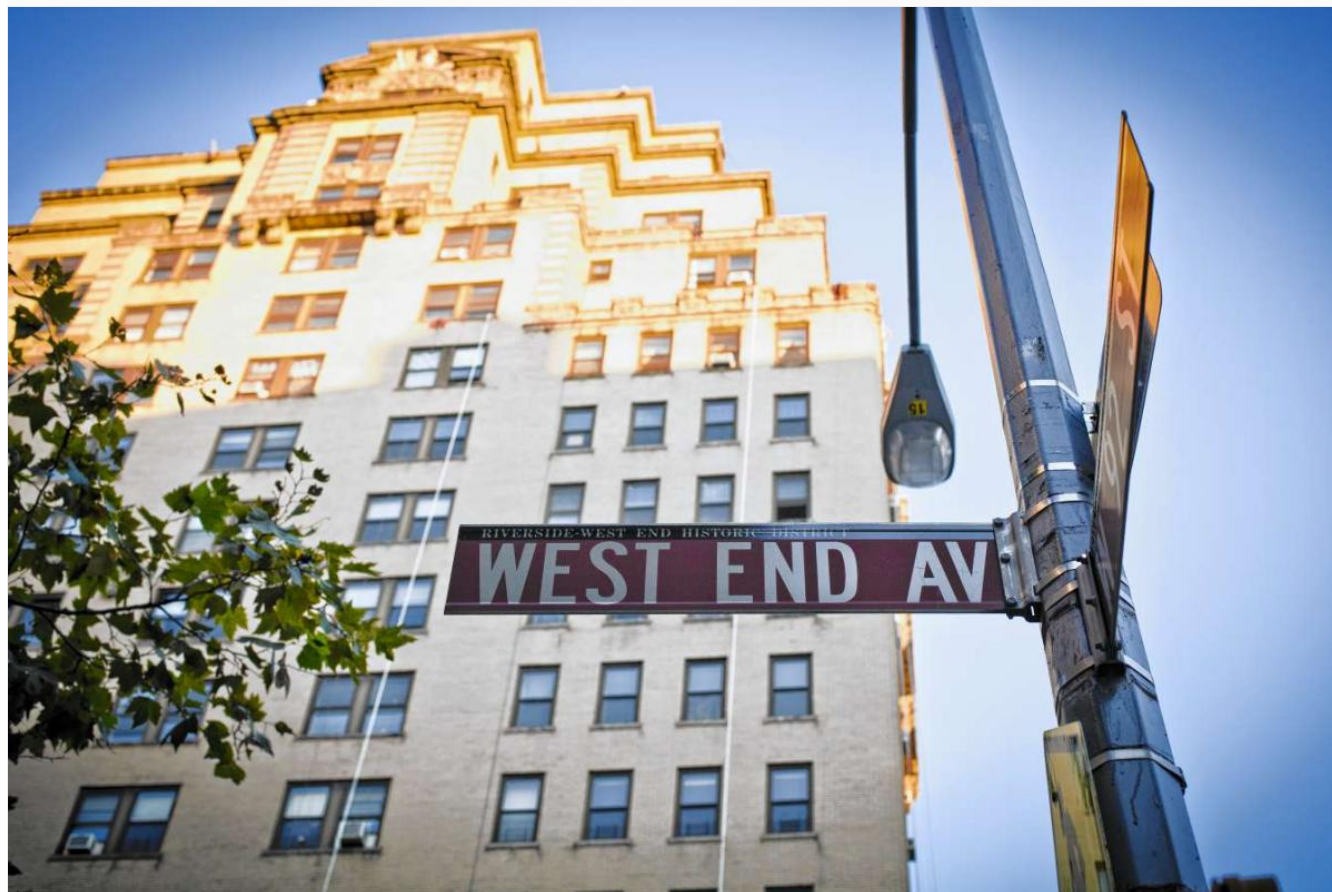


# The Upper West Side: No longer 'uncool'

BY JASON SHEFTELL

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The windemere at 666 West End Ave., is undergoing great change. (ALBERTO GUGLIELMI)

If you want proof the upper West Side is the most changed neighborhood in New York City, peek your head into the Windemere, a rental upgrade on 92nd St. and West End Ave.

For years, the building was a poor-condition rental with tired hallways and a magnificent lobby hidden under years of neglect. Now, the gray and maroon marble shines, the golden brass doors are polished, and the plaster moldings on the ceiling are as perfectly hand-crafted as the day the hotel was built in 1926. Upstairs, the musty hallways disappear floor by floor, replaced by dark corridors that resemble a boutique hotel.

A few blocks south on 88th St. and Broadway, a Brooks Brothers just opened. Mom-and-pop shops are gone. Chic boutiques and fine dining serve a new breed of upper West Siders who summer in Southampton rather than Riverside Park. On the buy side, the Laureate at 78th St. and Broadway has seen more than \$350 million sold in the past 18 months. Hedge-funders and fashionistas no longer call this neighborhood "uncool."



Courtesy of Windermere

A rendering of the indoor pool, being built now.

“The entire area is transforming,” says Brown Harris Stevens Select Marketing managing director Shlomi Reuveni, the exclusive agent at the Laureate and in charge of leasing at the Windermere.

“People moving to the upper West Side want an elevated lifestyle. They want amenities, services and shopping. It still has a very strong sense of community, but newcomers want more. That was the idea here. We want to give them what no other building nearby can offer.”

The Windermere has an indoor pool, a large children’s playroom, a concierge, a spa with treatment rooms and locker rooms, yoga space, a full fitness center and two rooftop decks with a garden, a terrace and a lounge.



Alberto Guglielmi

A cozy studio shows the large room sand interior spaces of the prewar building.

In all, this might be the most radical transformation yet of a prewar apartment building, mirroring in some ways the conversion of 15 Broad into a chic condominium and the Stanhope into Fifth Ave. palaces.



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“You just don’t have a prewar building with these kind of amenities,” says Reuveni. “You get the best of both of worlds: incredible history and solid building with modern design. We’ve already rented three four- and five-bedroom apartments priced at \$10,000 to \$16,000.” Units at the building range from \$2,200 for studios to \$16,000 for four- and five-bedroom units. Reuveni, whose group doesn’t take on run-of-the-mill projects, says the building’s owners could have just done a normal conversion without amenities and still gotten high rents, but they wanted something special.



Jeff Bachner/for New York Daily News

### Renovated lobby gleams with new plaster, refurbished marble and gold accents on the historic brass doors.

The building is the brainchild of Stellar Management, led by [Larry Gluck](#), and AORE Holdings, led by [Moshe Azogui](#) and [Yan Ouaknine](#), who purchased the property for \$68 million last year.

Azogui and Ouaknine worked with Stellar while at Brack Capital converting the Olcott from rental to condominium at 72nd St. At Brack, they finished the Greystone at 91st St. and Broadway. They all have experience in this neighborhood and in converting buildings with tenants.

In this case, 170 of the building’s 300-plus apartments are empty and are being converted to modern homes. Tenants paying market or stabilized prices occupy the remaining units. While some raised concerns about noise and safety, the upgrade of mechanical systems has turned the building into a better place to live.



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Alberto Guglielmi

### A large studio will rent for \$2,375.

“We’re very aware of the current tenant base, and have entire crews on hand to ensure no services are interrupted,” says Azogui. “It’s like performing open-heart surgery on someone who is awake. The building was in very poor condition. Now it has 21st-century upgrades.”





## Courtesy of Windermere

N-Plus and RSVP worked to make the common spaces, like the Sky Lounge, special.

Reuveni already has filled available units, and more come to the market every few weeks. Design is driving demand. Inside the homes, large entryways give way to prewar-size rooms. Master bedrooms can comfortably fit king-size beds. Unique features, such as thick black and white stripes on bathroom floors, chrome wedged shower door handles and round rubber doormat stoppers give the units a substantial feel. Oak floors have a dark stain and a matte polyurethane finish.

Designed by [Nicola Mongelli](#) of N-Plus Architecture and [Brian Ripel](#) of RSVP Architecture Studio, the units' creative process was a collaboration between the architects, who share a studio, and the developers. In each case, the designers emphasized past and present.

"We wanted to stress the great historic detail, but allow for modern and fantastic design elements," says Ripel. "Finding and researching what was new and how to incorporate that became the goal."

Mongelli, from Rome, is trained in modernizing older spaces, as are most Europeans. This building has great flair, something missing from other projects of its kind in the local New York market. At the same time, there is no gimmick, nor does it feel the architects tried too hard.

The lobby is a perfect example. After meticulous restoration that included rebuilding the ornate plasterwork in the ceiling and perfectly restoring the old bronze cashier window and brass grates and doors, the two designers added minimal modern touches. They included a gold-padded backdrop to the concierge desk, hexagonal gold seating elements that mirror the geometry of the ceiling and a new lighting technology called Hope from Luceplan. Made with a polycarbonate lens that multiplies the light, the fixtures twinkle like stars.

"This is the largest ever used of this light before," says Mongelli. "We researched materials so that nothing was easily recognizable, so people wanted to reach out and touch things, like the kitchen cabinets or some of the chrome finishes. Even the pool. It operates as a giant light box for the gym below."

With tens of millions spent on renovation, the result could yield higher rents than the rest of the neighborhood. Still, the Greystone at 91st St. and Broadway has studios and one-bedrooms starting at \$2,450 and \$3,145 — slightly more than Windermere. Windermere, though, has larger units that appeal to families, a target owners wanted to hit. It's this changing demographic of more affluent, younger families that contributes to the local retail transformation.

"Retailers are finally realizing that the upper West Side is affluent," says Prudential Douglas Elliman Retail chairwoman Faith Hope Consolo, a leading local and global retail saleswoman. "Columbus Ave. between 67th and 82nd Sts., is 100% occupied, which is influencing the types of businesses just north of it."

Dog trainer and walker [Joan Morgan](#), who has lived in the area her entire life, says the change isn't that apparent. "There is still an underbelly," she says. "It's not Park or Fifth Ave. yet. That building [the Windermere] is just one big cosmetic change."

Inside Windermere, new and old renters live together. Amenities are under construction. The lobby is nearly done. New elevators have been installed.

People come and go. Some talk to each other, stopping to look at the lobby. The building feels new and crisp. Untouched upper hallways show the mess that was before.

"You can really see and feel the difference between what is old and what is new," says Azogui. "The corridors are like two different worlds. We have purchased many buildings like this before. You get a good feeling of the quality of the real estate when you walk through here."

Maria Pena, an architect, will move in with her family in June. [Pena's](#) daughter will attend school a few blocks away.

A long-term downtown resident, Pena loves the old feel of the building with the new finishes, especially the floor. "I'm so sick of parquet," she says.

"To be honest, I don't know anything about the neighborhood. But I love the building, and life will be easier."