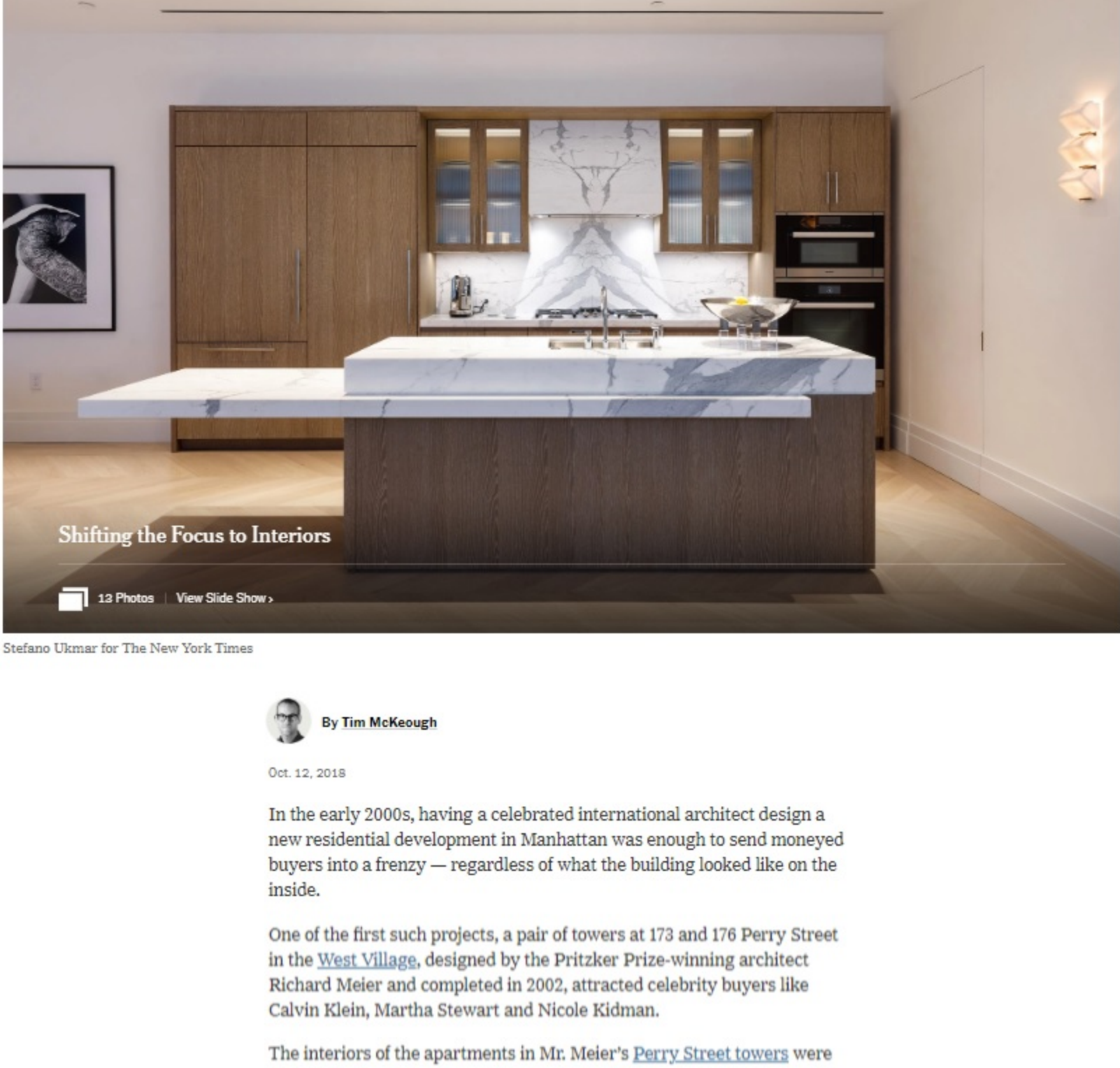


Interior Design, Front and Center

Hiring a high-profile architect used to be all it took to sell a new building. But now buyers want to see the interiors fully designed, as well.



Stefano Ukmar for The New York Times

By Tim McKeough

Oct. 12, 2018

In the early 2000s, having a celebrated international architect design a new residential development in Manhattan was enough to send moneyed buyers into a frenzy — regardless of what the building looked like on the inside.

One of the first such projects, a pair of towers at 173 and 176 Perry Street in the [West Village](#), designed by the Pritzker Prize-winning architect Richard Meier and completed in 2002, attracted celebrity buyers like Calvin Klein, Martha Stewart and Nicole Kidman.

The interiors of the apartments in Mr. Meier's [Perry Street towers](#) were delivered essentially raw, as buyers were invited to finish the units however they liked. And many other developments seemed to take a cue from the project that stoked a starchitecture craze, offering middle-of-the-road interior finishes and generic details that looked as though they were just waiting to be replaced.

“Your luxury buyer would come in and basically rip out the interiors and have their own interior designer come in and redesign the space,” said Susan de França, the president and chief executive of Douglas Elliman Development Marketing.

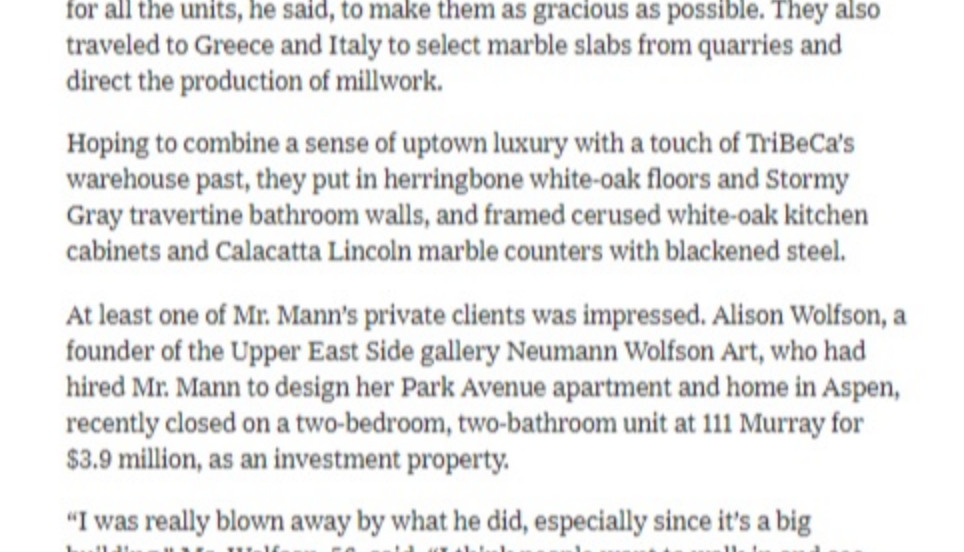
But in the market that has emerged since the recovery from the 2008 financial crisis, having a well-known architect attached to a building isn't enough anymore. Interior design is now front and center.

“Over the years, the ultra-high-net-worth individual and luxury consumer became that much more discerning,” Ms. de França said. “And we saw the desire for extraordinary interior design to complement the architecture.”

Prominent interior designers whose names are familiar to readers of magazines like Architectural Digest and Elle Decor — and who previously specialized in custom homes for private clients — are now designing the interiors of large-scale, multiunit buildings using the kind of exotic materials, finishes and details once reserved for the most bespoke homes.

Such is the case at [111 Murray Street](#), a 157-unit condominium tower in [TriBeCa](#) developed by Fisher Brothers, Witkoff and New Valley. The building was designed by Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates, but the lobby and amenity spaces were designed by Rockwell Group, the outdoor spaces were designed by Hollander Design Landscape Architects and the individual apartments were designed by David Mann, the founder of MR Architecture + Decor.

When Mr. Mann, who has designed homes for art collectors and boutiques for fashion brands like Lanvin, Dior and J. Mendel, first met with the developers, “one of the things I said was, ‘The kind of people who buy in these buildings are my clients,’” he said. “I know the things they like and don't like.”



David Mann, the founder of MR Architecture + Decor, designed the interiors for 111 Murray Street. He has also designed homes for art collectors and boutiques for fashion brands like Lanvin and Dior. Stefano Ukmar for The New York Times

Mr. Mann and his team lavished as much attention on the units as they do on private homes, he said, “from the planning of the interiors all the way through to the end: the detailing, the materials, everything.”

They reconfigured the apartment layouts the architects had given them for all the units, he said, to make them as gracious as possible. They also traveled to Greece and Italy to select marble slabs from quarries and direct the production of millwork.

Hoping to combine a sense of uptown luxury with a touch of TriBeCa's warehouse past, they put in herringbone white-oak floors and Stormy Gray travertine bathroom walls, and framed cerused white-oak kitchen cabinets and Calacatta Lincoln marble counters with blackened steel.

At least one of Mr. Mann's private clients was impressed. Alison Wolfson, a founder of the Upper East Side gallery Neumann Wolfson Art, who had hired Mr. Mann to design her Park Avenue apartment and home in Aspen, recently closed on a two-bedroom, two-bathroom unit at 111 Murray for \$3.9 million, as an investment property.

“I was really blown away by what he did, especially since it's a big building,” Ms. Wolfson, 56, said. “I think people want to walk in and see quality now. You see more closet space and nicer bathrooms than you did years ago. You see beautiful floors.”

That is exactly the reaction the developers were hoping for. “It's a very competitive market, and there are a lot of projects,” said Lauren Witkoff, the executive vice president of sales and marketing at Witkoff. “At the prices people are paying now, they have very high expectations.”

Jonathan Miller, the president of the appraisal firm Miller Samuel, said the current focus on upscale interiors initially grew out of developers seeking ever-higher prices per square foot, and, more recently, looking to differentiate their offerings in the face of a market glut.

“This quality of amenity was a product of creating a price point that had never been seen before: \$3,000 a foot to as high as \$10,000 a foot,” he said. “There was great emphasis on finishes and even common areas that were well above standards we had seen in the prior couple of cycles.”

But even as developers pivoted away from superluxury apartments with stratospheric price tags when sales of those units slowed after 2015, Mr. Miller said, the interior design standards stuck. “You still saw that quality embedded in lower price points, like \$1 to \$4 million dollars,” he said. “There was a mind-set change.”

As the market has slowed, inventory has grown. By the end of this year, Mr. Miller estimated, the number of unsold new development units in Manhattan will have increased to about 7,400, from about 6,300 at the end of last year, leaving buyers with plenty of options.

“It's not enough just to select average finishes,” said Shai Shamir, the chief executive of Brack Capital Real Estate USA, who recruited Leroy Street Studio to design the interiors of [90 Morton Street](#), a warehouse being converted to a 35-unit condo in the West Village by Asaf Gottesman, an architect and developer.

It will be Leroy Street Studio's first completed multiunit residential project, but Marc Turkel, a founding partner, said the firm has extensive experience working in new buildings, albeit usually after sales have closed: “We have a history of combining and transforming developer apartments for discriminating buyers interested in innovative design and refined finishes.”

This time, however, his firm is attempting to provide those things on the front end, with touches like quartzite slabs inset in wide-plank oak floors, Royal Danby marble master bathrooms, and kitchen cabinets made of walnut, blackened steel and ribbed glass.

At [40 Bleecker Street](#), a 61-unit condo designed by Rawlings Architects in NoHo, Broad Street Development was looking for a competitive edge when it hired Ryan Korban to design the indoor space. Mr. Korban, 34, is a buzz-generating interior designer whose projects include the fashion designer Alexander Wang's apartment and Balenciaga stores.



Ryan Korban in the sales gallery lobby for 40 Bleecker. His projects include Balenciaga stores and the apartment of the fashion designer Alexander Wang. Stefano Ukmar for The New York Times

As this was his first multiunit residential project, Mr. Korban said, “I thought I would just take all the things that I've loved over the years, and that I would want to live with,” and use them in the interiors. “I want people to look at this not just as a real estate project, but as a lifestyle, a home and a way of living.”

The result, as seen in the project's sales gallery, includes a lobby with custom statuary marble sofas and walls finished in suede and limestone, and apartments featuring chevron-patterned French oak floors, cerused oak kitchen cabinets from Italy with fluted burnished-nickel pulls, thick expanses of Grigio Dove and Calacatta Moonlight marble, and lighting schemes with integrated coves by Schwinghammer Lighting.

On a recent tour, Mr. Korban and Raymond Chalmé, the chief executive of Broad Street Development, joked about the tussle that occurred when Mr. Korban's ideas rubbed up against economic reality.

Mr. Korban gestured toward a range hood clad in book-matched statuary marble. “That was a two-year fight,” he said.

“I was coming around to seeing it your way,” responded Mr. Chalmé, who also belayed about Mr. Korban's insistence on having contractors remake samples for the terrazzo floors and textured oak cabinets until they were just so, and mused about how he could have saved by using less expensive cabinet pulls and lighting.

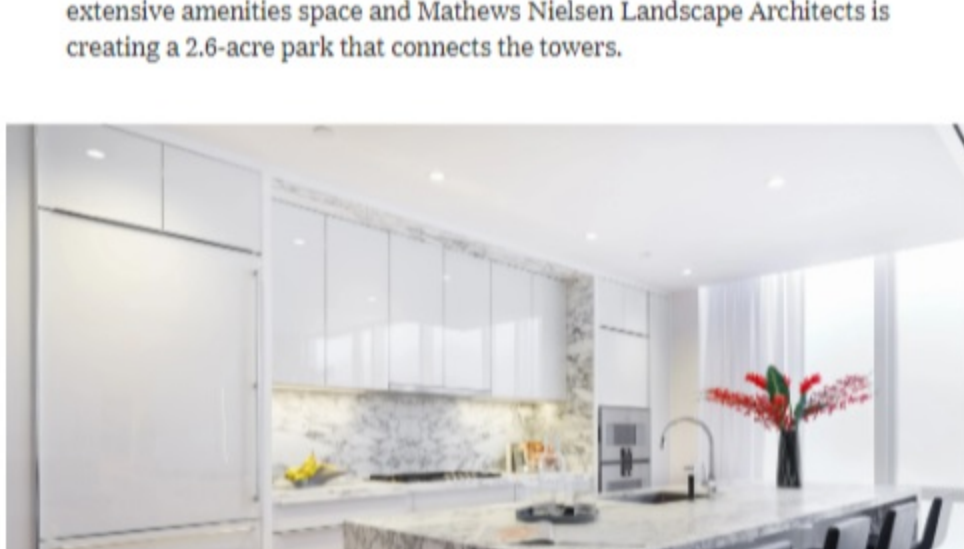
In the end, Mr. Korban got his way. And Mr. Chalmé was pleased enough to have the designer renovate his own Upper East Side apartment.

Bringing Mr. Korban on board also turned out to be a marketing coup. The fashion designer Brandon Maxwell shot his spring/summer 2018 [campaign video](#) with the model Jourdan Dunn in the sales gallery. This past March, Mr. Korban recreated the lobby of 40 Bleecker for his presentation at the [Collective Design](#) fair. A photograph of the model lobby also graces the cover of the designer's latest book, “[Ryan Korban: Interiors](#),” published last month by Rizzoli, which has been covered by Vogue, W and Harper's Bazaar.

But beyond the hype, Kaya Hall, who is in contract to buy a two-bedroom, two-bathroom unit for \$3.55 million, praised the holistic feel of the design. After visiting the sales gallery, “I instantly fell in love and instantly felt at home,” said Ms. Hall, 23, who works in real estate investment and had been immersed in an 18-month-long renovation of her own in TriBeCa, with no end in sight.

She initially “really loved the idea of doing a gut renovation,” she said, but “when I came across Bleecker and saw how beautifully he balanced all the details, I just thought that he did all the work for me and I wouldn't have to put so much time and effort into redesigning a space.” She now plans to sell her TriBeCa apartment.

In some cases, the furnished interiors presented in sales galleries and model units are so compelling that buyers want to purchase the entire package, furniture and all. Glenn Splendorio, who is in contract to buy a one-bedroom, one-and-a-half-bathroom unit for just under \$3.5 million at [125 Greenwich Street](#), plans to do just that.



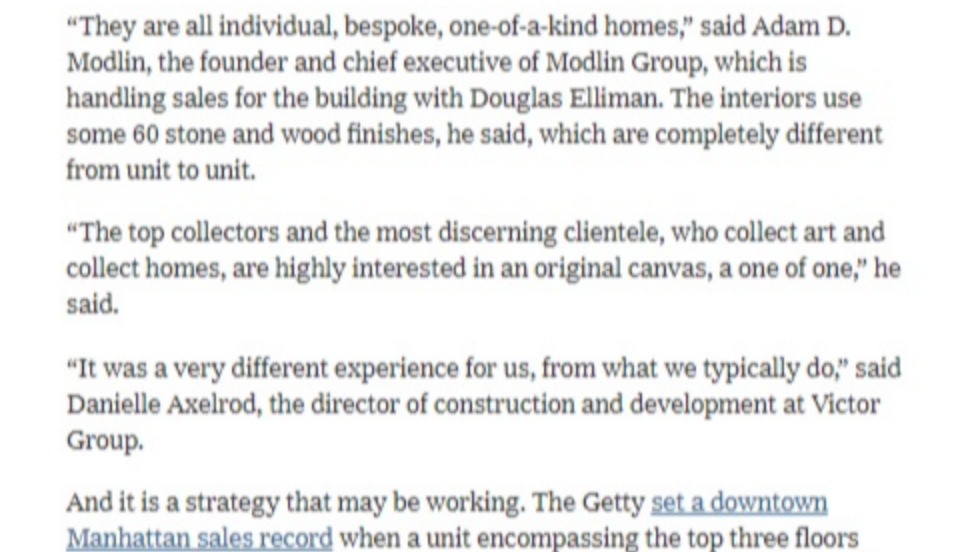
At 125 Greenwich Street, where the interiors were designed by March & White, buyers have the option of purchasing complete packages of furniture to replicate the vibe of the sales gallery. Stefano Ukmar for The New York Times

The project, a 273-unit building from Buzzi & Partners Development designed by Rafael Viñoly Architects with interiors by March & White, a firm that frequently works on super-yachts, offers packages of furniture and proposed layouts that allow buyers to replicate the vibe they experienced in the sales gallery.

“Having the option to make your life easy, and get something laid out that fits your configuration, I thought was pretty cool,” said Mr. Splendorio, 62, a health care industry executive. “Once I saw the models, I was sold.”

Of course, taste is subjective, and no interior design scheme will be universally appealing. To hedge their bets, some developers are recruiting several designers to create a range of options. HFZ Capital Group hired Paris-based Gilles & Boissier and New York-based Gabellini Sheppard to create distinct interiors for each of the two towers at [the XI](#), a [West Chelsea](#) project designed by Bjarke Ingels Group.

For [Waterline Square](#), a five-acre condo and rental development on the western edge of Manhattan between West 59th to West 61st Streets, GID development group paired a different architecture firm with a different interior design firm for each of the project's three towers. One Waterline Square is by Richard Meier & Partners and Champalimaud Design; Two is by Kohn Pedersen Fox and Yabu Pushelberg; and Three is by Rafael Viñoly and Groves & Co. In addition, Rockwell Group is designing an extensive amenities space and Mathews Nielsen Landscape Architects is creating a 2.6-acre park that connects the towers.



The kitchens for One Waterline Square, by Champalimaud Design, have white-glass cabinetry and honed Arabescato marble. Stefano Ukmar for The New York Times

“Each building has its own unique identity, yet they're all part of the same overall vision,” said James E. Linsley, the president of GID. “We've had buyers come to our sales gallery with a preconceived notion of what building they might want to purchase in because of the architect or interior designer,” he said, only to change their minds after exploring the other options.

Jonathan and PJ Ross, empty nesters from Westport, Conn., who work for a medical manufacturing company, chose the tower designed by Richard Meier and Champalimaud, which has a crisp, light-colored palette and a slightly more traditional vibe than the other two. They are in contract to buy a two-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom unit as a pied-à-terre.

“When they showed us the models in the sales office and all the different feelings, we just fell in love with everything about [One Waterline Square](#),” Mr. Ross, 48, said. “We think about it every single day.”

[The Getty](#), a five-unit condo at 503 West 24th Street from Victor Group, has created a range of interiors in another way: by having Peter Marino, the project's high-flying architect and interior designer, who is best known for designing stores for brands like Chanel, Dior and Louis Vuitton, make each unit substantially different.

“They are all individual, bespoke, one-of-a-kind homes,” said Adam D. Modlin, the founder and chief executive of Modlin Group, which is handling sales for the building with Douglas Elliman. The interiors use some 60 stone and wood finishes, he said, which are completely different from unit to unit.

“The top collectors and the most discerning clientele, who collect art and collect homes, are highly interested in an original canvas, a one of one,” he said.

“It was a very different experience for us, from what we typically do,” said Danielle Axelrod, the director of construction and development at Victor Group.

And it is a strategy that may be working. The Getty [set a downtown Manhattan sales record](#) when a unit encompassing the top three floors sold for \$59.06 million this past summer. The remaining units are priced from \$16.25 to \$21.5 million.

Of course, as more developers follow suit, building lavish interiors neutral enough to appeal to a broad group of buyers, it will become increasingly difficult to appear special.

“You want to do something that people have never seen before,” Mr. Korban said. “But then, there are only so many luxury materials.”

QUINN