

The New York Times

MARCH 14, 2014

Real Estate

Prewar Apartments from Scratch

By ALISON GREGOR

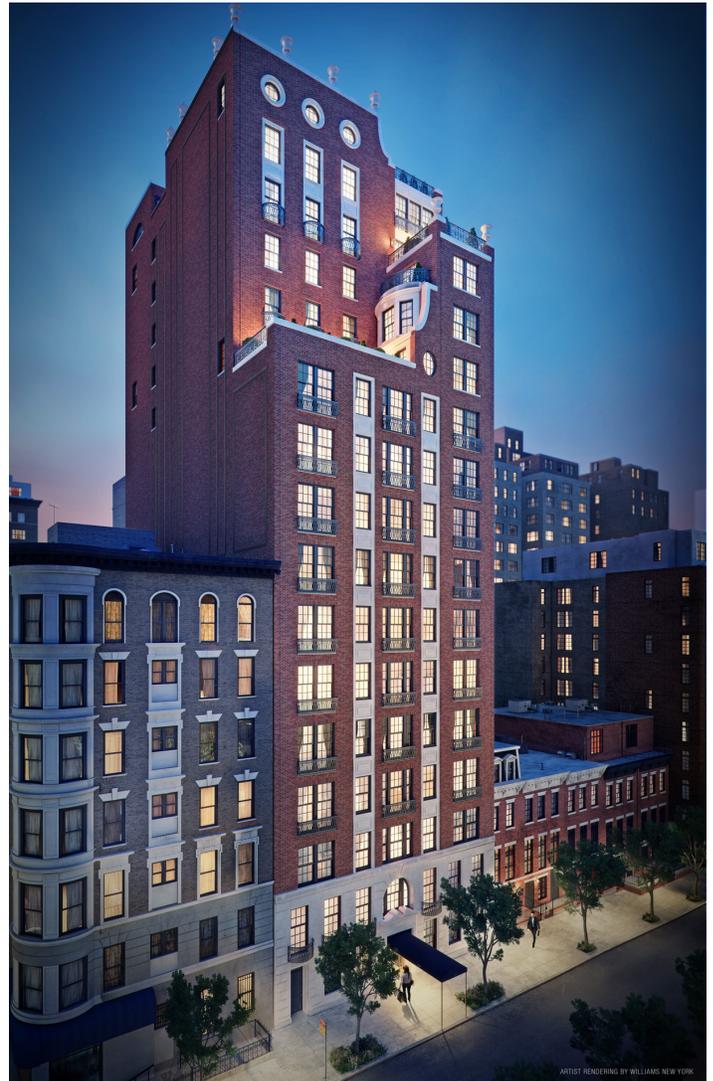
Developers have long profited from renovating out-of-date prewar apartment buildings to create interiors pleasing to today's buyers. But many are now building entirely from the ground up, in a style harking back to the era before World War II; the trend is particularly evident on the limestone-clad Upper East Side.

The latest of these elegantly styled throwbacks, 151 East 78th Street, was designed by Peter Pennoyer Architects, a firm known for its traditional and classical architecture. Sales at the 16-story condominium, which has 14 apartments, begin this month.

The building joins prewar revivals including 135 East 79th Street, 200 East 79th Street, the Touraine on East 65th Street and 1110 Park Avenue — all of them condominiums.

And more are on the way, said James Lansill, a senior managing director of the Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group. "There's one project in particular that will fit into this category," said Mr. Lansill, though he would not divulge any details. "It won't be on the market till late spring or early summer."

Corcoran Sunshine is marketing apartments at 135 East 79th Street, designed by the architect William Sofield with a facade of hand-laid brick and limestone and accents like street-level antique window grilles featuring a peacock and an owl. There are only three penthouses



left among the 30 apartments, ranging in price from \$18.5 million to \$28.5 million.

All these classic limestone reminders of another age — none of them developed in response to historic-district requirements — may have 15 Central Park West to thank for their

existence, Mr. Lansill said. That notably successful building, completed in 2008, was designed by Robert A. M. Stern Architects with a nod to the popular apartment buildings on Fifth and Park Avenues designed by the renowned prewar architect Rosario Candela.

“If there was a pivotal moment,” Mr. Lansill said, “it was 15 Central Park West, which is a contemporary building, meaning it’s new, but at the same time, it has considerable vocabulary that relates to more historic, prewar styling and detailing. It really captured the imagination of New Yorkers.”

But 15 Central Park West — which is large, with about 74 units in two conjoined towers — itself harks back to the larger Art Deco-style prewar buildings of the Upper West Side, among them the Majestic and Eldorado, said Cathy Taub, a broker with Stribling Marketing Associates, which will be marketing 151 East 78th Street.

The prewar revivals on the Upper East Side are boutique buildings of 15 to 17 stories, with a more stately appearance — and less “exuberance” than those on Central Park West, she added.

At 151 East 78th, where full-floor units will start in the \$10 million range and penthouses in the high \$20 million range, the classical exterior has details like small brick joints that reflect the craftsmanship of the early 1900s. The building will also incorporate modern amenities, such as floor-to-ceiling mahogany windows, said Robert Schwartz, a founding partner of Spruce Capital Partners, which developed 151 East 78th Street.

Mr. Pennoyer, who specializes in converting prewar apartments for contemporary use, said he gave weight to such qualities as symmetry in room design. The lower stories of the build-

ing, with a two-story limestone facade at the base, are a study in symmetry, while the upper floors are set back and asymmetrical, providing room for terraces, he said.

Facades aside, however, the qualities that lured most buyers to prewar apartments were size, ceiling height and layout, Ms. Taub said. Quite the opposite of the lofts that some buyers favor today, the prewar apartments had a series of foyers and vestibules leading to rooms and wings designated either private or public.

At 135 East 79th Street, a large portion of buyers were from the Upper East Side, said Daniel Brodsky, the managing partner of the Brodsky Organization, which developed the building as a condominium in the full awareness that the co-op status of many coveted prewar buildings in Manhattan can create unwelcome hurdles for buyers, he said.

“These people said, ‘Let’s move into a brand-new apartment that has everything we want in it and not deal with a co-op,’” Mr. Brodsky said. “They could sell their co-op, buy one of our apartments, and even keep some money in their pocket.”

Despite the oft-cited popularity of sheer, glassy towers with expose-it-all apartments, Mr. Pennoyer said, there is a lot to be said for masonry walls — which help blend the building organically into the Upper East Side, while also offering space to hang curtains or art.

“Buildings that are all glass tend to look most beautiful the days they’re opened,” he said. “But I think many people realize in the back of their heads that this type of more classic architecture ages not only well, but beautifully.”