

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

PROFESSIONAL WITH FACTIVA

July 18, 2012

## The Revenge of the White-Brick Apartment

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A white-brick apartment building was once a shorthand way of summing up everything that was wrong with modern architecture in New York.



Ramsay de Give for The Wall Street Journal

The apartment building at 530 Park Ave., which is undergoing a luxury makeover.

Now in the revenge of the white-brick towers, another early white-brick rental building—a 19-story tower of glazed white brick on Park Avenue—is being converted to luxury condominiums, with asking prices of up to \$9.95 million for a four-bedroom condo.

The building at 530 Park Ave., on the corner of East 61st Street, was completed in 1941, on the divide between the ornate prewar buildings that line major Manhattan residential avenues, and the simpler, more compact buildings of the post-war era.

There are a total of 116 condominiums at 530 Park Ave., according to condominium documents, including 36 that are still occupied by rental tenants protected by the state's system of rent stabilization and rent control. Bianca Jagger was one of the tenants who lost out. She was forced

out a few years ago, after the state's highest court ruled she couldn't be protected by rent regulation when staying in New York on a tourist visa.

The building is a few blocks west of an even larger white-brick condominium conversion at the block-square Manhattan House, with its five connected towers and what had been 582 rental apartment. That project—now estimated at a total of about 475 units—has been under way for more than five years. The apartments at Manhattan House are now more than 40% sold, said Patricia Hayes Cole, who is overseeing sales there for the Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group. She said there were 32 closings so far this year, with prices tightening in recent months.



Ramsay de Give for The Wall Street Journal

The living room in a model apartment in the building

With its huge-scale, large windows, balconies and a one-acre private garden, Manhattan House is often considered the finest of the white-brick buildings. But it was also the mother of many lesser imitators that dot the Upper East Side. Even the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission, in making the 1951 building a landmark, noted "frequent criticism that Manhattan House was responsible for a general decline in apartment house design."

The apartment tower at 530 Park Ave. was completed 10 years earlier, when developers had first begun shrinking the size of luxury apartments, reducing ceiling heights, and cutting out the once ubiquitous warren of maids' rooms.

It was designed by George F. Pelham Jr., with a plain white-glazed brick facade, with two gentle curves that wrap around the center of the building. Robert A.M. Stern, in his book "New York 1960," said the design reflected "reductive Modernism in the restraining simplicity of its detailing."

Both Manhattan House and 530 Park Ave. were sold to developers at the height of the real-estate boom, and a time of boundless optimism. In 2005, Manhattan House set a record at the time for the highest sale price for an apartment complex when it sold for \$623 million. In 2007, 530 Park Ave. sold for \$211 million, or about \$1,190 per square foot, more than the average price per square foot today for a finished Manhattan apartment.



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The dining room in the model apartment

Now the developers have dressed up the plain facade at 530 Park Ave., and introduced new interior plaster moldings and fancy kitchens and bathrooms. They have combined some apartments into larger units and plan more combinations.

The height of the lobby entrance has been doubled, some windows enlarged and others added. Decorative iron railings have been added on some windows to echo details on more traditional buildings across the street. Curved glass panes were installed in the curve of the building.

Aby Rosen, a principal at RFR Holding LLC, said his company acquired a majority, controlling interest in the project last year, replacing another investor, and is spending \$70 million in capital improvements.

He said that unlike jazzy new construction, 530 Park Ave. was a "quieter building" designed to emphasize its "timeless feel." He said he expected many buyers to be from abroad and out of town, looking for pied-a-terres close to the center of the city.

"Pied-a-terre buyers now often want three and four bedrooms," he said.



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The building's white-brick facade

Asking prices average \$3,250 a square foot, with the lowest-price unit a studio priced at \$1.625 million. A two bedroom on the 15th floor is priced at \$5.5 million.

Under the conversion plan, rental tenants continue to pay rent to the sponsor, who in turn pays taxes and common charges on all the unsold apartments, said Rae E. Gilson, director of sales at the project.

At Manhattan House on a square block between Second and Third avenues and East 65th and East 66th streets, 140 apartments are still occupied by rental tenants, Ms. Cole said.

Since it is farther east, and away from Central Park, prices at Manhattan House are considerably lower, with recent sales averages around \$1,700 a square foot. The highest-price sale in the building was \$7.3 million for a four-bedroom apartment; a high-floor two-bedroom is currently listed for just over \$2.5 million.

Ms. Cole said that buyers were attracted by the 10,000 square feet of rooftop amenities, as well as the garden, and the light that streams into apartments from multiple directions because of the development's unusual design.

"There is white brick and white brick," she said.

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