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New York's 432 Park Avenue is as much about restraint as it is about moneyed sky-high living.

BY ASIH JENIE

It is a special kind of affluence that allows a person to dream of and then literally look down on the Chrysler building. And yes, it is a special kind of affluence that would afford a person an apartment on one of the higher floors of Manhattan's 432 Park Avenue. Of course, an expression like "one of the higher floors" does not really describe the scale of the project, set to be 425.5 metres, 432 Park Avenue is slated to be the tallest residential tower in the Western hemisphere and will be visible from New Jersey, Long Island and Westchester when it is completed next year.

Located on Park Avenue between 56th and 57th street, the ultra-luxury residential tower took over its prime site from the Drake Hotel, built in 1926, which was acquired by developer Harry B. Macklowe for 440 million USD in the real estate boom of 2006 and demolished the following year. Where the hotel once stood now stands a tower of ultra-luxury apartments, the cheapest units of which will be studios priced from 1.59 million USD and only made available as staff quarters for buyers of the larger units from the 34th floor and up. The most impressive of which is the penthouse on the 96th floor, a 767-square-metre unit featuring six bedrooms and seven bathrooms; it was priced at 95 million USD, or a record breaking 123,860 USD per square-metre. And yes, it is already spoken for.

While the economics of the project and indeed its worldwide marketing campaign might make many balk at its sheer superlative nature, bordering on vulgarity, the architecture and interiors of 432 Park Avenue show surprising grace and restraint.

The tower's tall and impossibly thin architectural form comes courtesy of world-renowned architect Rafael Viñoly, who based the tower's design around "the purest geometric form: the square". The floor plan is square from the ground floor to the roof, each measuring 28.4 metres by 28.4 metres. The building also has two-floor breaks every 12 floors to reduce wind load. "I have always been interested in this typology of tall buildings," says Viñoly. "And I thought that a

building that could be as tall as this one at 432 Park needs to have this sort of well-balanced relationship between the form and the actual structure of the building."

The main structure of the building is a central core of 76-centimetre-thick concrete that houses elevators and utilities. The space between this core and the façade is completely free of any structural elements, and as such offers total freedom in the partition of rooms. This is achieved with a secondary support structure that is a frame system constructed by the beams and the columns of the façade. With no extraneous walls on the façade; each side of the building features six, three by three metres windows that make the most of the breathtaking 360-degree view.

Designing the interior of the building's 115 residential units is architect Deborah Berke, who has created floor plans that offer spaces that flow and take full advantage of Viñoly's amazing architectural shell. "When you talk about organising a room such that when you enter it you're on axis with this perfect square window... that is both modern and classical at the same time," Berke explains. "That is how you should enter a room, always in line with the view." In true modern tradition, the materials Berke has selected are sumptuous yet simple; the bathroom counter is a fixed slab of statuary marble, spanning wall to wall, out of which the sink is carved. The floorings are pale oak with herringbone patterns, a nod to the classic Park Avenue apartments of old. One of Berke's favourite elements is the long, solid marble counter in the kitchen, which is framed against the window.

In a city where developers race to one up each other with taller and pricier properties to house the one percent, 432 Park Avenue's upcoming reign as the Big Apple's tallest residential tower will be short-lived; the neighbouring 225 West 57th street has already been planned for a 494-metre-tall residential structure dubbed as the Nordstrom tower. But it might be a while before we would see a tall and thin beauty that's designed with the kind of grace and restraint embodied in 432 Park Avenue.

(OPPOSITE) 432 Park Avenue. Renderings by DBox for CIM Group and Macklowe Properties.

