



# BUILT TO THRILL

*Big-name “starchitects” are turning their attentions to that most humble of real estate developments—the condo building—and in the process are remaking not only the idea of what luxury living can be but also the very mise en scène of the worldwide cities they inhabit*

---

*By MARK ELLWOOD*



**21ST-CENTURY CAST-IRON** *The penthouse at Annabelle Selldorf's new 10-unit condo building at 10 Bond Street in Manhattan*



**S**HIRLEY VANGELOFF was considering an addition to her property portfolio, adding a home in Miami to those she already owns in Manhattan, Michigan and the Fort Lauderdale waterfront. The 50-something entrepreneur had visited several developments before she found the perfect condo in a new tower, One Thousand Museum. The location was impressive, close to Miami's burgeoning downtown arts district, with sweeping, swoon-worthy views across Biscayne Bay. But for Vangeloff, the most compelling detail was the architect behind the twisting, soaring skyscraper: Zaha Hadid. "She was the number one reason for me to buy, because of the visionary way she put that building together,"

Vangeloff raves. A fan of the Spanish architect Gaudí and the Russian-born French designer Erté, Vangeloff sees echoes of those artists' sensuality in Hadid's work. "Her architecture breathes. You can't believe those curves are structures that somebody could create in their mind." She adds, "I mean, I'd move into [an actual] museum, if she'd designed it."

This kind of enthusiasm is typical, according to Louis Birdman, the co-developer behind Hadid's new tower. "A lot of buyers come in, and they're almost like Zaha groupies," he laughs. "Maybe they'll say, 'Oh, we just got back from the opening of the cultural center she did in Azerbaijan.'" >





**MUSEUM WORTHY** Above: a residential balcony in Zaha Hadid's One Thousand Museum building, with views across Biscayne Bay toward Miami Beach; below: Hadid

The Anglo-Iraqi Hadid is part of the world's elite cabal of designers—sometimes dubbed “starchitects”—who are as famous as the buildings they create. Until recently, it was uncommon for these singular talents to work on anything less prestigious than large public works, such as museums or commercial buildings.

Now, though, these starchitects are increasingly turning their attention toward splashy residential developments in some of the world's top cities. Elsewhere in Miami, just south of Bal Harbour, Richard Meier is behind the 150-home Surf Club. In London, Frank Gehry is planning a residential complex adjacent to the soon-to-be-repurposed Battersea Power Station. On a plot of land at Transbay Block 8 in downtown San Francisco, Rem Koolhaas has committed to a 550-foot residential tower. And in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood, Norman Foster's firm is driving a new 19-floor tower overlooking the Hudson River. Also in Manhattan, Japanese minimalist Tadao Ando is planning a teardown in Nolita, and just blocks away, construction has begun on 10 Bond Street, a 10-unit condo building by Annabelle Selldorf, a German-born architect renowned for her spare elegance.

“I was fascinated by the idea of finding a contemporary expression of the turn-of-the-century cast-iron buildings in the neighborhood,” Selldorf explains. “And a residential building is interesting because how people live is interesting. How do people live differently today than, say, in the

1950s or 1980s? Everybody still sleeps horizontally, but in some ways it's very different. People have more stuff and more staff.”

Worldwide, these boldfaced projects are booming. In fact, real estate appraiser Jonathan Miller says it's virtually impossible to finance or market a luxury project without an impressive architect officially attached. “Now, it's a minimum barrier to entry, more like an amenity,” he says. “Oh, the building has a pool, a 24-hour doorman and it was done by fill-in-the-blank.”



Miller can pinpoint the project that kickstarted this trend: the stark white condos designed by Richard Meier on Manhattan's Perry Street. In the late 1990s, the Pritzker Prize-winning architect had just finished his \$2 billion reimagining of The Getty Center in Los Angeles, to worldwide acclaim. The plaudits and publicity surrounding that work made Meier an attractive partner for developers mulling two East Coast towers. These residential buildings were aggressively promoted as Meier masterpieces, a chance to live in a home designed by the genius behind the Getty. And the instant success of these condos—which had big-name buyers including Martha Stewart, Calvin Klein, Nicole Kidman and Sun Microsystems founder Bill Joy—all but guaranteed that other starchitect-branded projects soon would follow.

For Selldorf, the impact of the Meier condos was as much aesthetic as it was financial. Until then, in New York, >



**FOLLOW THE LEADER** *The condos Richard Meier designed on Perry Street in Manhattan (completed in 2002) are cited by many as the structures that kicked off the current trend toward big-name architects designing high-end residential buildings; above: Meier in his office in New York City*

luxury had long been synonymous with classic uptown pre-war apartments, since most of the new condos built between the 1960s and 1980s were unimpressive. “Quality went by the wayside,” she says. “They represented luxury in a fairly primitive way, just having marble slapped on the walls.” But with the debut of Meier’s luxe minimalism, an entirely new market was minted: “People became more able to articulate what they wanted in a building—namely, something that is well designed.”

“It’s the stuff you don’t notice, all the things you feel,” says Erin Boisson Aries, of luxury real estate firm Brown Harris Stevens, who leads the sales team for Norman Foster’s new Chelsea tower, 551W21. In that building, it’s the extruded metal window frames, which delicately reflect light into the rooms, through windows precisely placed to guarantee grand views yet maximum privacy. No columns carve up the apartments, and all systems are integrated and concealed, keeping the space clean and open. Aries estimates that an architect like Foster can add 20 to 30 percent onto comparable prices per square foot. A developer can, quite literally, pack more value into an apartment through such a partnership.

One of Corcoran’s top luxury brokers, Julie Pham, echoes this. She compares such spaces to diamonds, in that the

cost of some two-carat gems might far surpass that of rocks double their size, simply because the smaller diamonds are flawless. “The starchitecture brand isn’t just about design, but about a higher level of quality and finishes, a stamp of approval,” she explains. “It became a necessity rather than a curiosity because, amid this ramp-up of new development, this is how projects differentiate themselves.”

This focus on marketing in real estate has also underpinned the rise of marquee-name residences. Approvals for such massive projects in major cities are often lengthy, while the need to sell “off plan” (i.e., before a building has actually been constructed) has accelerated. Starchitect involvement can plug the gap between torpid bureaucracy and commercial pressures.

The globalization of real estate markets also is crucial. In Manhattan, some estimates suggest that between one-third and one-half of all buyers of new developments come from overseas. And it’s not just NYC: The British capital has been nicknamed Londongrad, or Moscow-on-Thames. Pham outlines the reasoning: “Say you’re from London, and you’re buying a pied-a-terre in New York. You may not have time to investigate who the best developers are, but you will >

---

## “STARCHITECTURE ISN’T JUST ABOUT DESIGN BUT ABOUT A HIGHER LEVEL OF QUALITY.”

---



recognize the names of these architects. Maybe you've seen a monument they've designed in Paris, so it resonates." This kind of branding is real estate's version of a Birkin bag, a familiar and international benchmark for quality.

Finally, no one understands the needs of their jetsetting clientele better than starchitects such as Hadid, who live much like their future residents and so can intuitively read their needs. Birdman notes that many One Thousand Museum buyers "know Zaha socially, through circles they travel in, or had met her somewhere at a party or a dinner." And who better to understand the critical features of a luxury condo building than a fellow denizen, after all?

For Vangeloff, the chance that Hadid might become even a part-time neighbor is a bonus, if a pie-in-the-sky one. "I'm hoping she loves her structure enough that she'll end up being a resident there, and I'm going to have the most incredible party, where I want her to be one of my guests," she laughs. "And I'm hoping to get more than five minutes with her."

Yet there are benefits to this miniboom that surpass the "people like us" allure. As more talented architects commit to residential projects around the world, the benefit to city skylines is priceless. No longer will they be blighted by forests of generic postwar towers, which Selldorf recalls from the 1970s and 1980s. Instead, there will be masterpieces on show for everyone to enjoy, whether resident or passerby. This chance to improve the overall urban landscape



WITH STYLE TO SPARE  
Annabelle Selldorf

is perhaps the most compelling draw for Selldorf and her fellow starchitects to helm these projects. "I think every piece of new construction has to be a contribution rather than just a job," she says. "There's a spirit in these new buildings that is very important. Of course, it's built to a very high standard for those who live there, but it must also be a fantastic building for those who walk by." ☺

## FIVE KNOCKOUT STARCHITECT-BUILT RESIDENCES



### ONE THOUSAND MUSEUM

**LOCATION**

Downtown Miami

**ARCHITECT**

Zaha Hadid

**PRICE RANGE**

Half-floor residences \$5M-\$7M, full-floor penthouses \$14M-\$17M.

**CRAZIEST AMENITY**

The rooftop helipad, accessible from the premium penthouse by a private elevator.



### 551W21

**LOCATION**

Chelsea, NYC

**ARCHITECT**

Norman Foster, Foster + Partners

**PRICE RANGE**

Standard apartments from \$5,575,000. Penthouses from \$35M.

**CRAZIEST AMENITY**

The top-floor penthouse, with a 4,000-sq.-ft. open roof deck and a private rooftop pool.



### TRANSBAY BLOCK 8

**LOCATION**

Financial District, San Francisco

**ARCHITECT**

Rem Koolhaas, OMA

**PRICE RANGE**

TBD—project only recently greenlit.

**CRAZIEST AMENITY**

Regular Joe neighbors. Local housing laws require that 27 percent of the 740 units must be priced at affordable market levels.



### THE EAGLE

**LOCATION**

EC1, London

**ARCHITECT**

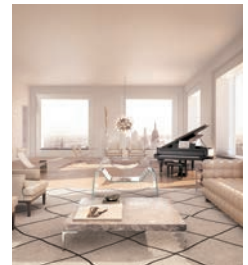
Terry Farrell

**PRICE RANGE**

Just 50 units (out of 206 total residences) in this Art Deco-inspired building remain unsold, priced from \$1M-\$1.7M.

**CRAZIEST AMENITY**

A resident-only spa and cinema.



### 432 PARK AVENUE

**LOCATION**

Midtown, NYC

**ARCHITECT**

Rafael Viñoly

**PRICE RANGE**

Average price is \$6,894/sq. ft. The penthouse (sold) was offered at \$95M.

**CRAZIEST AMENITY**

The views. At 1,396 feet, this superskyscraper will outshine even the Freedom Tower (not counting its spire).