

GOTHAM

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Haute Property
NEWS, STARS, AND TRENDS IN REAL ESTATE

A living room at Philip House, 141 East 88th Street, where the 1920s apartment building received a gut renovation.

history in the remaking

CONVERTING LANDMARK PROPERTIES TO LUXURY RESIDENCES REQUIRES A DELICATE BALANCE BETWEEN RESPECTING THE PAST WHILE DEVELOPING FOR THE FUTURE. BY MIKE OLSON

What's true in the worlds of sports and celebrity is just as applicable in Manhattan real estate—nothing tops a good comeback story. Yesterday's rundown rental can become tomorrow's coveted condo conversion. Around the city, a trio of buildings is doing just that, combining old architectural flourishes with new amenities to resurrect fading structures and breathe new life into their neighborhoods.

Andrew Kotchen, cofounder of architectural firm Workshop/apd (39 W. 38th St., 212-273-9712; workshopapd.com), has a front-row seat to this movement. "The trend is definitely to update historic, character-driven buildings to create a modern living environment," he explains. "People would much rather live in an older building than buy in a new glass box, so

it's a great base to work from."

Kotchen speaks from experience; his current project, The Printing House (421 Hudson St.; printinghousewestvillage.com), is the reclamation of an old industrial building in the West Village, one with a cloudy history, but thanks to his work, a bright future. However, that doesn't mean the project hasn't been a challenge. Its leaky ceilings and dated décor—the remains of a previous conversion attempt in 1979—had become something of neighborhood legend. Kotchen sums up what he saw with one word: dismal. "It felt compressed and dark," he adds. "The units weren't designed to capture the volume of the light that can pour in."

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A dining room at Printing House in the West Village.

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Indeed, what the old Printing House lacked in charm, it made up for in vast open spaces. As such, Kotchen and his team brought out the building's character by stripping it back to its raw space, letting the 15-foot ceilings and huge windows show off the property's scale.

The new, improved Printing House, which has units available from Halstead Property (837 Broadway, 212-381-6500; halstead.com), is on display from the remodeled hallways (goodbye, drop ceilings) into each of the 64 loftlike condominiums, where Kotchen honored the building's past with a style he calls “rustic modernism”—new materials with an older feel such as blackened raw steel, hand-glazed tiles for the kitchen and travertine marble in the bathrooms. “We brought a modern aesthetic to it, but it has a patina to it,” says Kotchen of Workshop/apd's

design plan. “We made it feel like a home.”

Uptown, the same can be said of Philip House (141 E. 88th St.; philiphousenyc.com), the conversion of a Carnegie Hill prewar spearheaded by the same group that rocked the downtown real estate world a few years ago with the Devonshire House. “Our work at Devonshire House informed Philip House from start to finish,” says Susan Hewitt, president of the Cheshire Group (826 Broadway, 212-824-1190; cheshirellc.com).

Built for the Rhinelander Real Estate Company by Sugarman & Berger (the architects behind One Fifth Avenue and the New Yorker Hotel), Philip House, built in 1927, was a prime candidate for a gut renovation. “It's entirely new from the outside in,” explains Hewitt. And though today's buyers love touches like the Crestron lighting system and radiant floor heating in the bathrooms, Hewitt learned from the Devonshire's success that modern conveniences work best when combined with classic finishes.

Chief among them are the wood-burning fireplaces that can still be found in many of these 79 condominiums. Likewise, the windows are in the classic “six over six” style, while even new touches like the crown moldings and coffered ceilings use this same prewar vocabulary to create warm, expansive layouts. “These [buyers] are people who understand New York,” says Hewitt. “We're unlikely to get buyers who are obsessed with being in someplace shiny and trendy.”

Warren Lofts (37 Warren St.; 37warren.com), the reimaging of a historic Tribeca building listed by Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group, has some shine—but it also has the history to back it up. The building, unique for its Art Deco style in a land of Italianate architecture, was built in 1931 by Starrett & van Vleck, the firm

behind the flagship stores of Saks Fifth Avenue and Bloomingdale's and once the home of the prominent seed purveyors Stump & Walter Company.

Acquired by developer Sonny Bazbaz (299 Park Ave., 212-537-5897; bazbazdevelopment.com) after years as a grime-covered office building, 37 Warren's unfortunate interiors rivaled those of The Printing House, from drop ceilings to pink marble in the lobby. That made the decision to gut the interior an easy one, leading to discoveries like the original riveted steel columns that have been sanded, painted, and incorporated into some of the 18 layouts.

Still, Bazbaz is perhaps proudest of the new drywall that frames the ceiling beams, a costly feature that honors the original design. By using the building's old bones, Bazbaz and his team evoke the spirit of a true '80s era loft with its 11-foot ceilings, exposed structural elements, and huge windows. “Our goal was to create a handful of authentic Tribeca lofts,” he explains, “but with finishes superior to most new development condo projects.”

Nowhere is that mix of old and new more apparent than at the top of Warren Lofts, where four stories have been added to the original seven below, creating penthouses clad in bronze-colored panels that change in tone as the sun moves across the sky. With this new addition, Bazbaz accomplishes what is perhaps the most important aspect of the conversion process—putting his own stamp on a historic building as it finds a new use.

Thankfully, Bazbaz is not alone in cherishing the past while keeping an eye on the future.

“Some people believe in starting from scratch and throwing up cookie-cutter type buildings, but you lose the quirkiness that makes a home unique,” says Printing House's Kotchen. “It's great to be part of something that has more of an impact on the city than just one dot here or there. This is a footprint. It's fantastic. I would absolutely do it again.” **G**

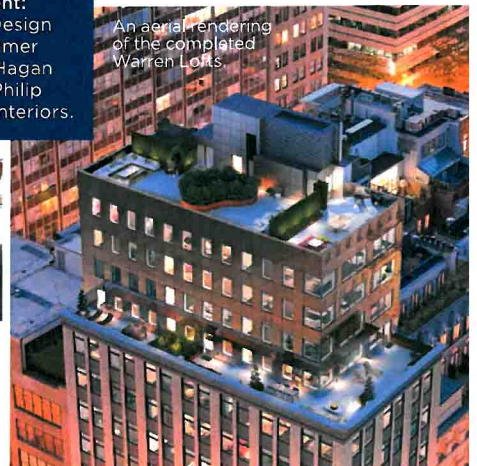
INSIGHT

Homework: In addition to homes in NYC and beyond, Workshop/apd also redesigned Building 92 at Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Hagan sent: Interior Design Hall of Famer Victoria Hagan created Philip House's interiors.



The master bedroom mixes old and new design and architectural elements at Warren Lofts.



An aerial rendering of the completed Warren Lofts.