

May 28, 2013

Famous Designers Lend Their Flair to Spur Luxe Home Sales

By [Amy Zimmer](#)



High End Apartments Done by Famous Interior Designers

MANHATTAN — In the high-end world of Manhattan real estate, having a famous interior designer dressing up model apartments is almost par for the course nowadays.

“Happy Chic” designer [Jonathan Adler](#) was tapped to bring his hip sensibility to model residences at 225 Rector Place, a rental-turned-condo in Battery Park City. Celeb fave [Mariette Himes Gomez](#) — whose work for Michael J. Fox and Tracy Pollan made a recent cover of *Architectural Digest* — brought her refined eye to a three-bedroom model apartment at 515 East 72, [a luxury condo on the Upper East Side](#).

But [Victoria Hagen](#) — whose work is regularly featured on the pages of *W*, *Elle Décor*, *Town & Country* and other glossies — prefers leaving her imprimatur on an entire building.

Hagen left no detail overlooked, handpicking everything from the crown moldings in the living rooms to the brushed-nickel handles on the bathroom sinks at the condo conversion of a pre-war building on Lexington Avenue and East 88th Street.

“I don’t do model apartments because I don’t like doing a set-up room,” Hagen said. “For me, I like thinking about a lifestyle, how a space functions. It lets me take what I do with my clients on a day-to-day to a larger scale. It’s a very complete process.”

For her work at [Philip House](#), at 141 E. 88th St., she wanted to make “tired” rooms of a stately Carnegie Hill pre-war building more suitable for families today.

She thought about where kids would play and where their parents would sip their morning coffee. She altered the spaces so they “flowed much more,” transforming dining rooms that had been walled off and turning small kitchens into eat-in ones.

“It has a fresh, clean vibe but still has a lot of character,” Hagen said of the redesigned interiors.

“So much of my work is about the setting — where is it? The Upper East Side is in the middle of a great cultural area, close to the park, a great neighborhood. So that was part of the formula.”

She also redid the lobby, changing the doors, among other fixtures.

“I always say, ‘Hello starts on the corner and earlier.’ It’s not when you get upstairs. It’s when you’re approaching [a building].”

Hagen’s name is a big draw to potential buyers of Philip House — which is 50-percent sold, with prices starting at \$3.6 million and going upwards of \$15 million for the penthouse — said Robert McCain, of [Stribling & Associates](#), who is overseeing sales.

“A large majority of the buyers are people who already live in the neighborhood or already live in the city,” McCain said. “Maybe they’re upgrading or don’t want to do renovations.

“If you’re going to buy a co-op, maybe you’re going to get a good deal but it’s going to require a total redo and then, if you hire Victoria Hagen, it will cost a lot,” he continued.

“We’re not cheap... but if someone did this on their own it would be a lot more expensive — even prohibitively expensive.”

Hagen is designing some 50 apartments in Philip House, which still has roughly two-dozen rent-stabilized tenants remaining in their homes amid the Cheshire Group’s renovation of the rest of the building, McCain said.

In buildings where designers are only doing models, those apartments were attracting potential buyers, too.

“I wanted to create a space that would allow the owner to feel a sense of ease upon entering,” Himes Gomez said of the 1,838-square-foot unit at the swanky new building at 515 East 72nd St. that’s available for \$3.5 million.

“I believe composing a room is like writing music — you need exciting passages and then moments to rest your eye,” she said of the spaces she designed.

Unlike the natural palette favored by the designers uptown, the four model apartments that Adler dreamed up for the [Related Co.’s](#) building at 225 Rector Place were filled with the bright colors and bold patterns typical of the design guru.

“People walk in and say, ‘Wow,’” said Sherry Tobak, senior vice president at Related and lead sales agent on the project, which is 50-percent sold with starting prices at \$573,000. “His furnishings are

so vibrant and colorful and exciting sometimes you don't see the apartment, you're too busy looking at the furniture."

As an added bonus, buyers — described by Tobak as "young, savvy and hip" — get a 10-percent discount on everything on display in the models at the Adler home store on Greenwich Avenue.

"You're not just buying a couch or table but his brilliance of what can be done in this apartment," Tobak said, noting that one of Adler's models is the focus of a negotiation and may be bought for roughly \$750,000, furniture and all, by a woman gifting it to her daughter.

"It's not quite \$100,000 over the purchase price," she said, "but it's getting up there."