NEWS & NOTES

A NOOK FOR NANNY

THE LUXEST BUILDINGS IN NYC NOW OFFER SECRET, TINY APARTMENTS THAT ONLY OWNERS CAN SNAG

Story by MARK ELLWOOD Illustration by AMY MARTIN

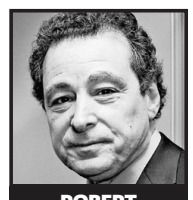
AMID New York City's luxury penthouses and sprawling duplexes is a stash of secret rooms: one-bedroom and studio apartments that will never appear on public listings or the open market. These bijoux crash-pads — known as accessory apartments — are available only to elite families who've already bought (much larger) homes in the building.

Rafael Viñoly's cloud-scraping tower near Central Park, 432 Park Avenue, includes such hush-hush assets, as does the West Village's new luxury complex the Greenwich Lane. Among that development's 200 units are six small apartments — starting at around 500 square feet for $1.26 million — and offered for sale solely to existing buyers; four are already spoken for. It's a similar setup at NoMad conversion 212 Fifth: Its 48 units include six smaller apartments on the second floor, averaging around 425 square feet and starting at around $875,000.

CASPAR HARVARD-WALLS

So what's the appeal of these tiny, secret apartments?

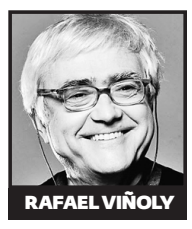
"The competition to hire, and keep, the best staff — a personal assistant, nanny, butler or house manager — has gotten way more intense over the last 10 years," explains Caspar Harvard-Walls, a partner at Black Brick in London (where the trend first gained traction). "So the way they are housed has changed enormously."



ROBERT GLADSTONE

In other words, if you want a top-tier Poppins to tend to your precious offspring, she won't settle for a dank room with a bunk bed; modern Mary expects the same finishes and fixtures as the family home, albeit on a smaller scale.

And there are other motivations informed by the increasingly informal and in-flux lifestyles of typical buyers. "People often work from home today, so if both spouses are there they might prefer a place they can go to be alone — say, if they're writing a book," notes Greenwich Lane developer Robert Gladstone. "Maybe they have a kid returning from college who is one of those millennials who needs to move in with their mom and dad."



RAFAEL VIÑOLY

Of course, the concept is hardly a new one. In Manhattan's Gilded Age, buildings often incorporated smaller accessory apartments (mostly studios for staff) tucked just below the roof. It's the reason there are so many pronounced cornices among developments from that era. While many of these vintage examples have been swallowed up by surrounding apartments, the strategy is now being revived in luxury conversions and new builds.

These clandestine hideaways — real estate's version of speakeasies — are quickly becoming a brag-worthy high-end amenity. And once the kids no longer need that practically perfect nanny, there's no need to downsize — simply sell the spare apartment. As long as the buyer is already a neighbor.

"These apartments are intended as a convenience to owners in the building," Gladstone emphasizes. "So we do ask that someone doesn't resell to an outsider."

PLOT TURN

Film House creates short movies with original storylines to help sell luxury properties.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FILM HOUSE.

HOME MOVIES

SPLURGING on glossy renderings is so early aughts; now, the hottest sales tool for a luxe NYC crash-pad is a custom-made mini movie. And the Scorsese of selling homes is Curt Hahn, the Tennessee-based owner of Film House. This seasoned film vet turned his movie-producing skills to moving houses four years ago, at the suggestion of a real estate-agent friend.

It's given Hahn's four-decade career in movies, commercials and concert films (where he's worked with Candice Bergen, Garth Brooks, Reba McEntire and Isaac Hayes) a new twist. He now shoots and edits at least one such "home video" somewhere in the country each month; budgets run around $20,000 per shoot, and each is painstakingly scripted and cast.

For a museumlike home more suitable for a family without young kids, Hahn's mini movie featured a childless gay couple, which helped seal the deal with their real-life counterparts. When tasked with selling an eight-figure ski lodge in Telluride — "the kind that one-tenth of the 1 percent could afford" — Hahn imagined a CEO keen on creating a family hideaway. So he scripted the story of a father soothing his mirror-image, workaholic daughter with a trip to the grand lodge, during which the entire clan surrendered their cellphones. The lodge quickly sold to a wealthy family, as planned. "It so resonated that we've now done several versions of that storyline for other homes," Hahn notes.

He explains that several factors have driven the domestic-movie boom. Staging, of course, effectively transforms ordinary homes into movie sets. The prevalence of social media has made video an ideal (and shareable) selling tool. And the globalization of high-end buyers has been crucial.

Indeed, one couple spent $1.4 million on an apartment without ever visiting in person. Recalls Hahn: "They told me, 'We watched that movie at least 25 times, we know where every stick of furniture we own is going to go.'"

— Mark Ellwood

Meridith Baer stages luxe homes for sale — then flips the furniture at a discount.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MERIDITH BAER.

STAGE CRAFT

TORI Toth, of StylishStagers.com, was recently hired to custom-decorate a four-bedroom home on the Lower East Side, in the hopes of luring perspective buyers. But a "nosy neighbor" from the floor above stopped in, fell in love with the temporary living room and bedroom design, and offered to snap up all the furnishings. "The best part was we didn't have to send that furniture back to the warehouse," Toth says.

Staging a luxe apartment listing with artfully arranged décor is a mainstay of real estate today. But what happens to those elegant trappings when that seven-figure pad is in contract? Oftentimes, browsers and looky-loos snag the swag, usually for rock-bottom prices, turning open houses into the equivalent of a Boffi pop-up.

Meridith Baer — the doyenne of staging whose namesake firm works with high-end listings in both NYC and LA — has also witnessed the trend. "Forty percent of the times we're in a home, at least something sells," she says. "It's like they're walking through Bloomingdale's."

Baer's enormous operation (*MeridithBaer.com*) includes its own workshop that builds custom furniture for the 600-plus homes she's staging at any given moment. Every 18 months she refreshes the silhouettes of her sofas and beds, then sells off last season's collection: A handmade, all-down 7-foot sofa costs just $3,000, while an upholstered king bed fetches $3,800.

"We love selling furniture," she chuckles. "And if someone buys everything, we'll give them a great deal."

— M.E.

BUYING THE WORLD

$5 MILLION HOMES AROUND THE GLOBE

NYC: This four-bedroom, 3,375-square-foot Billionaires' Row residence comes with its own chef's kitchen. X Factor: three levels of coveted living space all to yourself. *Compass.com*

MONACO: Soak in expansive Harbor and Mediterranean Sea vistas from the balcony of this two-bedroom home. X Factor: You're neighbors with the lush, cliffside Jardin Exotique. *John-Taylor.com*

LONDON: In posh Mayfair, this refurbished flat offers two bedrooms and oversized windows. X Factor: A 20-minute stroll leads to the gates of Buckingham Palace. *KnightFrank.com*

HONG KONG: Generous, oversized windows reveal panoramas of affluent Mid-Levels in this two-bedroom residence with its own chef's kitchen. X factor: Lovely Hong Kong Park is a hop away. *ChristiesRealEstate.com*

DUBAI: This 9,400-square-foot waterfront villa in Palm Jumeirah boasts four bedrooms and a spacious roof terrace. X Factor: Gaze out onto the glittering Arabian Gulf in your bathrobe. *LuxHabitat.ae*

PARIS: Ornate moldings adorn this two-bedroom *appartement* near the Champs Elysees. X Factor: *Mon dieu* — you're steps from the Seine! *ChristiesRealEstate.com*
— Zachary Kussin

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