MANHATTAN

MODERN LUXURY™

Travel Issue

THE WORLD ON SALE!

Sacre Allure! Paris for Less

London: Pound for Pound

The Best Hotels Under $250

Beijing, Buenos Aires, and the New Jet Set Chic!

SAM ROCKWELL

Goes to the Moon!

+PLUS DESIGN OF THE TIMES: IS BRICK THE NEW BLACK? > LINGERIE TAKES TO THE STREETS > BARE IS BEAUTIFUL: SUMMER FASHION! > CAN PERFORMANCE ART BE COLLECTED? > 25 WAYS TO MAKE NYC BETTER NOW!

MAY/JUNE 2009 $5.95

MANHATTAN 7 ... 8TH FLOOR NEW YORK, NY 10018

BRICK IS BACK Nolita's 211 Elizabeth has that prewar look, but was recently built from the ground up by Roman & Williams.

The New Prewars?

After a decade of building look-at-me glass towers, some New York architects are heading in a new direction—back in time

| *By Sophie Donelson* | *Photography by Kate Glicksberg* |

New York recently had a brief moment of transparency as glass residential towers heaved their way through town like glaciers. They had names like spaceships (The Oculus, The Oro, The Cielo) and CB radio handles (Lux 74, The Edge). Their monikers didn't make sense, but their impetus did: Times were good, what was there to hide? Certainly not the B&B Italia sofa, or the catered dinner party.

If the cash-laden inhabitants felt free to expose themselves at home, it's because their skeletons were hidden on Wall Street—too bad the trend toward transparency in architecture didn't rub off on the financial system. Within years of the mid-2000s heyday, women started shrouding their Hermès splurges in discreet brown shopping bags. Now the feeling is, the less your neighbors know about you the better.

The crash of the glass aesthetic doesn't suggest that there weren't elegant examples. Starchitects like Jean Nouvel and Richard Meier created the models, but a bumper crop of imitations quickly overshadowed them. The slapdash condos had all the trappings of luxury (glass curtain walls, marble countertops) but they skimped on production—like sewing silk charmeuse with a rusty needle. Cheap glass distorted some views, and rooms leaked when it rained. Not that anyone noticed, since many units sit empty.

A new wave of condos about to open, however, in lower Manhattan is inspired more by the past than the future. Nolita's 211 Elizabeth St., a from-the-ground-up condo built and designed by Manhattan firm Roman & Williams, is the most rigorous example. The 15 units are unmistakably prewar with walnut herringbone parquet floors, hulking high-gloss black painted moldings and weighty wooden windows. It's quintessential Roman & Williams—in fact, it looks a lot like the husband-and-wife team's Noho loft. Sickened by the impermanence of their work, the former set designers fled L.A. and sought projects with more staying power.

But as firm principal Stephen Alesch notes, some modern residences are as disposable as those L.A. sets. "I felt ripped off in condos on the West Coast and in cheap buildings," he says. "When you walk into a building with eight-inch-thick walls and plaster moldings, you can continued...

...continued never again accept steel studs and two layers of drywall."

Tedium, Alesch says, was the keyword, for 211, and there were days when the masons laid only a few dozen bricks on the six-story structure. "We'd see a building where they'd lay 300 a day and say to ourselves, 'easy equals emptiness, tedium equals satisfaction.' That was our mantra."

Roman & Williams are the de facto spokespeople for this movement—their work says it most clearly, and clients like Ben Stiller and Gwyneth Paltrow help with publicity. But the marketing of this new brand of apartment generally eschews name architects in favor of touting labor-intensive craftsmanship and the exquisite treatment of humble materials, such as brick. Of the artisan-ization of goods, Alesch says, "we do it with beer and food and cheese and shoes, but architecture has lagged behind. Why can't we turn the corner?"

The now-finished building, on the sunny southwest corner of Elizabeth and Prince, across from where comely Café Habana patrons linger, doesn't disrupt the roof line or the neighborhood chi. By fall you might catch a glimpse of the penthouse tenant entertaining guests at the wood-burning fireplace on her terrace (there's one inside, too), or seated on the deep-set windowsills, admiring the city view, sans noise (it's heavily soundproofed). Most passersby will think the building has always been there. And Roman & Williams built it as if it always will be.

There are strictures for building in Nolita, but the west side is another story. West Street, up through the Village to the Meatpacking District, is a contemporary architecture garden, with contributions from Frank Gehry, Winka Dubbeldam, Shiguru Ban, Nouvel and Meier. A landmark district protects Village townhouses, but near West Street the boundary disintegrates. Despite having free reign, architect-developer Cary Tamarkin chose brick for his two projects in this corridor.

"A lot of the buildings here have a 'look at me' factor," says Tamarkin, whose aesthetic is more *An American Tragedy* than *American Psycho*. "Some look like such a joke now, you'd be embarrassed to walk in there. Simplicity seems more appropriate for these times; it's less about wearing your wealth on your sleeve."

Clockwise from top: Copper plates under construction for FLAnk's 385 W. 12th St.; the exterior of architect-developer Cary Tamarkin's 456 W. 19th St. will boast hand-laid black brick and multi-paned steel windows.

"You have these wild, sculptural, genius architects like Gehry and then you have all these other buildings screaming for attention," Tamarkin says of the west side. "It's like a bunch of people yelling at each other."

Tamarkin, who is widely credited with the successful conversion of industrial buildings into loft apartments, considers himself a modernist, albeit one with traditional ideas about light, proportion and quality materials. "Even five years ago I thought the glass reeked of fad-ism, not stability and timelessness, which is what I strive for," he says. His seventh and eighth projects pull from the tradition of industrial buildings on the fringes of the city. "You have these wild, sculptural, genius architects like Gehry and then you have all these other buildings screaming for attention," he says of the west side. "It's like a bunch of people yelling at each other; it's hard to have a conversation." Tamarkin's projects differ in aesthetic and price point: 397 W. 12th St. is five raw spaces ranging from 3,000 to 6,500 square feet and starting at $5 million, while 456 W. 19th St. offers more conventional layouts at half the cost. But both are clad in brick; the former with hand-laid, custom-molded Roman brick, a golden-hued material favored by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Neighboring 397 W. 12th St. are two more notable new-builds of remarkably different stripes. Finishing up this fall is 385 W. 12th St. by FLAnk, an architecture and development firm. It has an eye-catching exterior of copper plates, but only for now. In 30 years its patina will resemble that of Lady Liberty. Brick it's not, but the tenets of craftsmanship and permanence apply. The firm says the evolution of the material mirrors a slowly changing neighborhood. "With any luxury good, from electronics to automobiles to housing, you want to feel quality and texture," says FLAnk's Tim Crowley. "People are drawn to things that are built well. The renderings are misleading. Compare the best and worst finished product and you'll see the renderings are similar."

Buying from renderings is exactly what allowed carbon copy prefab construction, and many shoppers had trouble distinguishing between two equally lustrous objects. Marketing materials promised all the look of a Meier building without paying a premium for the name—it's like the Muji of condos. But true craftsmanship can't be knocked off, which is why townhouses never go out of style—they've always been deemed an appropriate place to park a fortune. So bets Related, the mega-developer in the final stages of building Superior Ink, which includes a modern condo tower by Yabu Pushelberg on 12th Street and seven townhouses by Robert A.M. Stern on Bethune, one of which was recently purchased by Marc Jacobs for $13 million.

"Our customers want something that's not trendy, they want enduring value, privacy and understatement," says Related vice chairman David Wine. He devised the townhouses with that in mind. They're wider and shallower than the typical Federal-style ones down the block (and therefore, light-filled), though Wine's company—despite the astronomical asking prices—forwent hand-laid brick in favor of brick panels that are pock-marked to imply age. That decision drew the ire of critics. "We tried to balance what was possible from a craftsman standpoint and what was not," he says, noting the homes' iron and stonework details. Owners won't ever have to see the exterior of their building if they don't want to, as residents can enter through 12th Street or the garage; both connect to the townhouses through a private basement passage. "It's paparazzi proof," says Wine. Indeed, you can't get that behind glass walls. M