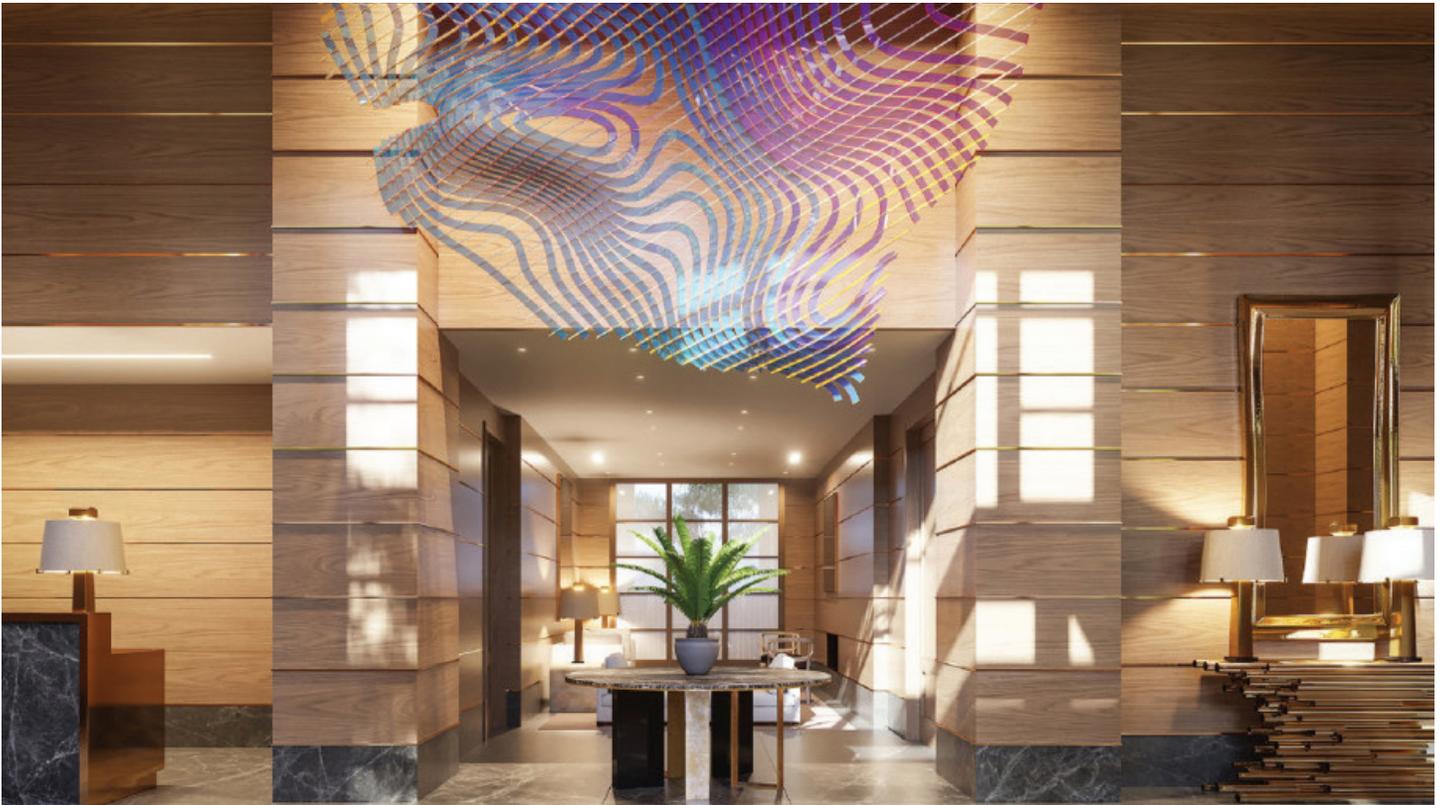


## *Luxury buildings are spending big bucks on fancy lobby lighting*

July 18, 2018 | By Jackie Cooperman



From hunks of nylon rope to confections of the most delicate Venetian glass, elaborate lobby lighting installations — often created by A-list designers — are the hot new amenity in the city’s hypercompetitive luxury apartment market.

With costs running from \$10,000 to hundreds of thousands of dollars, the pieces are a significant expense, but industry veterans say they’re well worth the investment

“The big installations are very important because they create sidewalk appeal. People walk by, are wowed and want to go inside. It’s very effective,” says designer Karen Asprea, a partner at the firm Whitehall Interiors, whose buildings include 91 Leonard St. in Tribeca, a 111-unit condo with two-bedrooms starting at \$2.52 million.

When they move in next spring, residents will be greeted by Mamaroneck-based lighting designer Luke Kelly’s 6-by-5-foot neon rope chandelier. The \$20,000 installation, a visual exclamation point at the end of a long entry corridor, would have been all but impossible several years ago.

“We used to be limited to neon tubes, but now fiber optics can be put in the rope, so you get flexibility and movement. It’s no longer so rigid and static,” says Asprea. “I could put anything on paper and it could be created.”

That same spirit motivates designer Kelly, a former Lehman College business major with no formal design training known for his patented work with woven nylon rope and LEDs. “I have a habit of saying yes to things and then figuring them out,” he says. “I enjoy the learning.”

It’s a boom time for lighting fabricators and artisans.

“We’re constantly looking for new people to work with,” says Greg Keffer, a partner with Rockwell Group, which designed the lobby of 111 Murray, a new 157-unit condo building where two-bedrooms start at \$4 million.

Keffer commissioned a \$20,000 lobby chandelier from Downtown Brooklyn-based glassblower Jamie Harris, whose 7-foot-high work juxtaposes soft brass needles and hot blown glass that’s been exposed to tin chloride, a chemical technique favored by turn-of-the-century stained glass maestro Louis Comfort Tiffany.

“The biggest challenge was getting the look of the glass right,” says Harris, who’s been working in glass for 20 years and used the technique, known as iridization, as a tribute to the neighborhood’s industrial past. “We had to make almost three times as many finished pieces just to edit out the perfect one.”

Other designers are also applying sophisticated techniques to humble materials and installing them in the most rarefied spaces.

A neon and galvanized steel chandelier by Herzog & de Meuron encircles the ceiling of the concrete-accented lobby at 56 Leonard, the starchitects’ sleek Tribeca building. East New York-based Patrick Nash formed the glass tubing by hand, fitting it with 1-inch steel pipes and spray painting them with black enamel. Developer Alexico Group will only say the price is “in the six figures.” Closings began at the 145-unit building in 2016; the least expensive condo available is a one-bedroom asking \$3.17 million.

At 325 Kent in Williamsburg, Brooklyn-based architect Thomas Leeser created what he calls a “domino” lobby, lining the ceiling and walls with painted aluminum perforated with geometric shapes and illuminating the whole thing with slender horizontal LED bulbs. (Appropriate, given that the 522-unit rental, whose market-rate two-bedrooms command \$5,198/month and up, is the first of four residential buildings to open on the site of the Domino sugar factory.) For the under-construction 46-unit condo 70 Vestry, Related Companies hired Red Hook-based artist Alyson Shotz to create an iridescent acrylic and aluminum sculpture, its colors changing with the viewer’s angle and the ebb and flow of natural light in designer Daniel Romualdez’s lobby. Apartments at 70 Vestry, slated for completion this fall, start at \$7.95 million for a three-bedroom. Neither development would disclose the price of the commissions.

While local artisans frequently take pride of place in new lobbies, many of the most opulent projects still favor traditional European craftsmanship and materials.

Tribeca’s 70 Vestry which will feature an iridescent sculpture by Alyson Shotz.

When complete, Tribeca’s 70 Vestry will feature an iridescent sculpture by Alyson Shotz.Noë and Associates with The Boundary

At The Kent on East 95th Street, Champalimaud Design commissioned a \$33,000 pair of gilded chandeliers from Czech glass manufacturer Preciosa. It highlights the newly opened Extell condo building’s gold leaf ceiling. Most of its 83 units have been snatched up; for-sale pads start at \$4.11 million for a three-bedroom.

Meanwhile, developer and renowned art collector Aby Rosen’s new building, 100 E. 53rd St., features a nearly

\$125,000 Murano glass chandelier, produced by Seguso, a Venetian company in business since 1397. Commissioned by designer William T. Georgis, the installation oozes an unapologetic luxury, its 6-foot-wide swath of 160 hand-blown crystal tubes a focal point for the building's private residence club. Every apartment purchase comes with access to the swanky spread, which spans two floors and includes a library, a 60-foot swimming pool, Pilates and yoga studios, a gym and spa treatment rooms.

Manhattan designer William T. Georgis tapped Seguso for the \$125,000 chandelier at 100 E. 53rd St. Brian Zak/NY Post

"You're not just lighting a space when creating a piece like this. The goals are to create a piece which responds to context, inspires the imagination and makes people want to live here," says Georgis. 100 E. 53rd has 94 condos slated for move-ins this year; a 1,000-square-foot studio is on the market for \$2.3 million.

For the 20-foot-high lobby ceilings at One West End, Flatiron-based designer Jeffrey Beers designed a \$300,000 pair of brass and metal mold-cast glass chandeliers to "command the space." Beers, a veteran glassblower who double majored in architecture and glassblowing at the Rhode Island School of Design, says lighting's come a long way since his first installation, a florid series of magenta and pink fixtures at a then-hot spot, Noho restaurant Bar Lui, in 1985. "It was more of a 'Miami Vice' time," he says.

According to Samantha Sax, chief marketing and design officer for One West End developer Elad Group, "Lighting is one of the most important design aspects of any property."

Move-ins began last fall, and the 246-unit building — where pricing goes from \$5.27 million for a three-bedroom to \$19.5 million for a four-bedroom — is about 80 percent sold.

The new lighting creations, Sax says, "are really art installations and become focal points of the lobby. We do have art, but it becomes the backdrop. The lighting is paramount."

What helps, Beers adds, is that classic glassblowing technique and innovative technologies allow him to be as subtle or as grand as projects demand.

"The way the fixtures themselves have come from LED to fiber-optic to film — there's so much availability in the lamping and the element itself. We're able to light up walls and ceilings and it's almost a ballet, a dance of light," he says.

Glassblower Jeffrey Beers created colorful hand-blown orbs for the food hall beneath The Ashland. Eric Laignel

For Gotham Market at The Ashland, a Fort Greene food hall at the bottom of a 2016-opened 586-unit tower where studios start at \$2,650, Beers designed 180 colorful blown-glass spheres, connecting them into a sinuous chandelier that weaves its way above seating and counters for seven restaurants. (The Ashland would not name the cost of the work.)

That fluidity, Beers and his colleagues say, is just the beginning. The ability to work in pliable and three-dimensional materials and with increasingly small bulbs means that options are nearly limitless. The next wave, they add, are some lights targeted to residents' circadian rhythms and others that even unleash fragrance.

All of which is excellent news for the designers lighting up the city, one lobby at a time. "The whole world of lighting is opening up, and it's a complete, harmonious marriage for me as an architect and glass artist," Beers says.

"I'm particularly fond of bold gestures."