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How Cary Tamarkin Balances Being Architect and Developer

His latest project in West Chelsea pairs smart development with stunning architecture

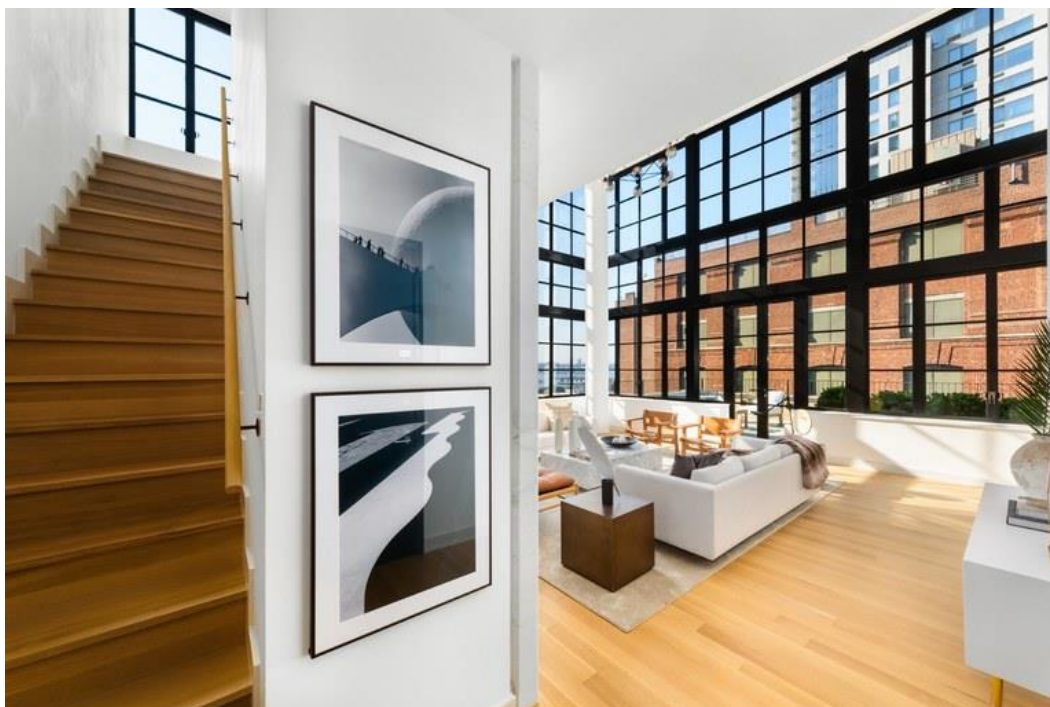
Most developers are not intimately involved in design details. Yes, finding a talented firm, discussing the project's direction, and making final approvals are part of the job, but the role doesn't (usually) require a mastery of building specifications. For one New York architect-developer, though, knowledge of both sides of the building process is what sets his practice apart. Cary Tamarkin, the founding principal of Tamarkin Co., boasts a portfolio of successful projects with almost a dozen condo buildings under his belt in Manhattan, and has carved out a niche for himself as the technical and business powerhouse behind it all. By controlling both the development and the design—two camps sometimes at odds—Tamarkin develops celebrated boutique properties that have people clamoring to move in. (In fact, his spaces have garnered somewhat of a fan club—certain residents are known to hop from one Tamarkin project to the next.)

Tamarkin began his foray into development after over a decade as a practicing architect. After years of work with what felt like not much payoff, he made a career shift into the more lucrative cousin of his own field—real estate development. Though Tamarkin admits that developers are often seen as the enemy of creatives, he has found a way to merge the two into a successful yet rewarding business. And, yes, we mean successful—his first project on Perry Street, in Greenwich Village, netted the new businessman a cool million. He's has been the developer and architect on all of his projects since.



Inside a unit of 550 West 29th Street.

Tamarkin often pursues projects in areas that are on the cusp of a newfound popularity. A past project for the firm—208 West 24th Street—is adjacent to the High Line, yet was developed before the ever-popular city walk was set in stone. Now, Tamarkin is banking on the same thing to happen a few blocks north, where he's at work on his latest project: 550 West 29th Street, developed in partnership with Highline Development Group. "On 24th Street, galleries were moving in, families were around, and things were progressing," Tamarkin says of his earlier project. "Now, the same thing is happening on 29th Street."



Inside a penthouse unit.

With Hudson Yards a mere block north, Tamarkin knows that a population boom in the neighborhood is imminent. "I'm really happy it's a block away from all the movie theaters, stores, and subways," he says. "It's going to be a huge advantage for us."

Yet he doesn't see Hudson Yards as competition. Of the soaring glass towers, Tamarkin says, "Those buildings kind of sell by amenities and lobbies that look like hotels and we don't do any of that. We are not heavily laden with amenities, that's not a reason you would buy in our buildings, it's all about the space and the architecture."

None of Tamarkin's projects are ostentatious, though they have a distinct style. Most noticeable are the signature metal casement windows, which at 550 West 29th Street take in views of the Hudson River. Double-height ceilings and utilitarian-style staircases add to the lofty feel. With 19 units and 12 stories, over half of the condos have private terraces, a hot commodity in New York City. "The buildings in West Chelsea were all kind of rugged, industrial, lofty, and muscular, which is the same way I would describe our buildings," he adds. The architecture takes center stage.



*A kitchen clad in Rift & Quartered white oak cabinetry.
Tim Waltman*

Tamarkin's developer side shows most in the finishes he chooses for his projects, which veer more simple than other luxury developments. In 550 West 29th Street, for example, only the master baths are clad in marble—the rest feature subway tile. "That's what I do in my own place because I don't feel like you need to go through a whole marble in a secondary bathroom," Tamarkin explains. (And if someone wants to upgrade a bath, the cost is on them to renovate.) "We don't paint the walls all different colors, we use very simple trim," he says. "I make sure that things are really neatly done but minimally done."

Kitchens feature top-of-the-line appliances and finishes—a critical marketing moment for new condos—but the units don't come with lighting fixtures. Some developments often market turnkey units or built-in amenities as a play to entice buyers, but with a smaller (and quite wealthy) client base, Tamarkin has found this unnecessary—most wish to put their own stamp on the spaces once moved in. A budget for renovations and decorating is typical.



*On a penthouse terrace.
Tim Waltman*

Finally, Tamarkin's attention to the penthouse units shows the mind of a true developer. "The penthouse is where the real money is made," Tamarkin says, "so the terrace and the outdoor space becomes really key." 550 West 29th Street features three penthouses that range from 2,950 to 3,850 square feet. Investments in the penthouses include palatial terraces and cavernous common areas with curtain walls of windows. "I keep figuring that everyone keeps calling us the window guys, so let's make this the mother of all curtain walls," he says of the decision.

With today's demand for luxury developments, Tamarkin reflects positively on his career shift over 20 years ago. "It just really opened my mind to what else I could do."