

# The New York Times

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## These Apartments May as Well Already Have Monograms



Inspired by a project he was working on about the birth of photography and aviation during “a time when strange blimps floated gently through the sky against early industrialized landscapes,” Mr. Noritz, a filmmaker, wrote in an e-mail that he “wanted to build a unique experience for all visitors and myself.”

What he ended up with is an apartment with an extremely specific design that he is now trying to sell for \$1.75 million. Past the green submarine door at the entrance, a 32-foot zeppelin dominates the room; it gently changes colors overhead — first amber, now turquoise, now violet. Gears and wheels and wood casting molds hang from the walls and ceiling. There are shiny concrete floors burnished a deep sepia, like the patina on one of Mr. Noritz’s favorite Rodin sculptures.

In the bedroom, a Murphy bed can be lowered with a pulley system attached to a skateboard, landing under an arched frame draped with speckled white cloth. With a mix of retro-industrial, underwater fantasy and science fiction elements, the apartment is unusual, to say the least.

“It’s crazy,” said a broker who gave his name as Frank N. and sipped a Brooklyn Lager while staring off into space at a marketing party at the apartment last week. “Very crazy.”

For New Yorkers, an apartment can be many things: a retreat from the bustle of the city; a spot to rest between nights out and days behind the desk; a social hub to entertain friends. But to some, it is much more than those things: not just the proverbial blank canvas to be decorated to a certain taste, an apartment is unmolded clay to be shaped into a phantasmagoria, a place where image and metaphor become as important as square footage and layout.

Then one day, almost inevitably, the owners want to move on.

Take for instance, the two-bedroom apartment on Barrow Street that Adam Kushner, an architect, made into what he thought of as an idealized urban environment before deciding to sell it because he and his wife had twins and needed more space.

The idea, he said, was that there would be a physical entrance and a visual exit that related to the city, so he used materials people would find outside: a subway door and subway tile at the entrance and stone similar to New York's bedrock.

The center of the apartment, carved from two studios on the top floor of a small cooperative, is meant to be a realm of the senses and the four elements of earth, fire, water and air. There is a figurative water core with a kind of stream running through a countertop in the kitchen and into a Jacuzzi surrounded by Mexican beach stone and a shower on the second level above with a clear glass floor. Earth is represented in the use of timbers reclaimed from the building's roof, which was removed to accommodate the second level Mr. Kushner built.

"There's nothing off the shelf — everything had to be custom," Mr. Kushner said, adding that he had dreamed of designing and building his own place since boyhood. "It was a labor of love. It truly was."

But the renovation, which took four years and cost "a couple hundred thousand," Mr. Kushner said, posed a marketing challenge for his real estate agent, Diane Wildowsky of Sotheby's. The apartment was originally listed in 2005 at \$2.75 million with Corcoran, according to [Streeteasy.com](http://Streeteasy.com), and was then reduced to \$2.475 million in 2006.

Ms. Wildowsky recalled attending a lunch for brokers at the place years ago. "The apartment was very unusual, not a lot of privacy," she said, "and I remember thinking, 'Oh my God, how would you sell this?'"

Corcoran apparently did not find a way — “It wasn’t meant to be at the time,” Mr. Kushner said — but last year Mr. Kushner approached Sotheby’s and Ms. Wildowsky ended up with the listing. It took her a minute to make the connection, but when she realized it was the same place, she said, laughing, that she thought, “Oh, my God, I can’t believe this is the apartment we’re talking about.”

But, in New York, she said, there are people who look for unique and unusual spaces, and so she pushed that aspect, first listing it in September 2010 for \$2.065 million, and dropping the price to \$1.995 million three months later. According to city records, it sold for \$1.9 million in July to Gonzalo Mauricio Merlo, who did not respond to an e-mail seeking comment.

Over the months, Ms. Wildowsky said, there was a lot of interest in the property — there were some offers, but they were low; some buyers wanted to gut the space — and potential buyers were more concerned about the lack of space than the lack of privacy or the specificity of the design.

Brokers say these kinds of apartments are rare, but they frequently come to market at too high a price because the sellers are so invested in what they have created. Mr. Kushner says he settled for far less than he had originally sought, and a few brokers at 120 West 29th Street said they thought the asking price was a little high.

But Parul Brahmhatt, who is selling the apartment at the real estate company Core, said that she priced it a little low, given that it is more than 1,800 square feet with more than 600 square feet of outdoor space in a desirable area that has few apartments. Plus, there is about \$300,000 worth of items and materials in the place that she sees as added value for the right buyer.

“As specific as it is and as difficult as it may be to sell, it’s like a piece of artwork and so at least we could give it due respect and attempt to find the right buyer,” she said. “In truth, we only need one buyer.”