

October 18, 2013

Bells and Whistles Back in Demand as Value Takes Back Seat to Amenities

With over-the-top features like the recent 50,000 s/f deck complete with tennis courts and a dog run at TF Cornerstone's 4545 Center Boulevard in Long Island City, the bar has once again been set for luxury amenities for the well-heeled.



But TF Cornerstone's loaded amenity deck isn't the only luxury addition turning heads these days.

From saunas and Turkish baths to wine cellars and tricked out gyms, New York buyers are back in luxury mode, according to the city's brokers.

In Lower Manhattan, upscale rental and sales condo building 15 Broad Street boasts a fully-functional bowling alley for residents, as well as an indoor lap pool, basketball and squash

courts, and a yoga/ballet studio.

"It's not necessarily what they're asking for anymore, it's what they're expecting," said longtime Douglas Elliman agent Lawrence Rich of clients. "They want the whole kitchen sink."

After the economic crash of 2008, buyers and renters were looking more for value than luxury, said Lawrence, but with the market getting stronger, over-the-top amenities aimed at drawing people in are coming back.

"Since the downturn, people will go to neighborhoods that wouldn't normally have considered a luxury location if they can get what they want in the building," said Corcoran agent Scott Stewart.

Buildings that offer more amenities than the average building, like full-service gyms with training staff and swimming pools, are driving up prices for the apartments, said Stewart.

"As the new projects come online, the price per square foot Downtown will raise dramatically because of the cost of construction," said Stewart. "You're going to see a lot of extensive amenities offered. I think the range and level in these buildings will be much greater."

At One Museum Mile, a Robert A.M. Stern designed condo building on Fifth Avenue near 109th Street, the building not only features a rooftop swimming pool, gym and children's playroom, they also have a "tween" room for older children, said Stewart.

Downtown at 150 Charles Street, which is still under construction but 100 percent sold out, units sold "well over" \$3,000 p/s/f.

"Their club level is truly beyond," said Stewart. "Now luxury purchasers are looking for juice bars and a battery of health products within gym culture, including chiropractic and nutrition advisory, on-site massage and spa treatments."

Stewart sees a "vast difference" in condo buildings with amenities and without amenities.

He recently sold an apartment at Ariel West, a building at 245 W. 99th Street on the Upper West Side that is 2,900 s/f, has four bedrooms and three and a half baths, and was priced at \$5.1 million.

"The building offers everything one expects for the luxury lifestyle," said Stewart. "A gym with a swimming pool, storage bins, children's playrooms, a media room and a party room. I ended up selling it after multiple offers to an all-cash buyer for \$5.3 million."

The couple that purchased the pad were empty-nesters that specifically looking for a pool for their grandkids for when they visited.

"It's really made the upper 90's and 100th Street by Broadway a hot area," he said of luxury buildings like Ariel West. "It has raised the price per square footage dramatically for that area. It's really unheard of in that location."

Jodi Stasse, a Citi Habitats agent that works in the New Development Marketing division, said that developers are honing in on creating buildings that offer residents an array of lifestyle amenities right in their own home – so they don't even have to leave the building.

"Developers are really focusing on building amenities that really enhance the daily lifestyle and taking areas like outdoor space and programming them right so they really have multiple uses, even year-round," said Stasse. "Like an outdoor fireplace, which extends the use of outdoor spaces."

In addition, builders are becoming more intuitive to the wants and needs of residents, in an effort to take a step above the status quo.

"There's a real focus on health and fitness and really programming fitness spaces so it will create the right type of uses and people can utilize them as their primary fitness clubs," said Stasse.

Placing the gym on a higher floor that has natural light rather than the basement and looking at how people are working out, what types of equipment they are using, and what hours they are using it are all part of the thought process.

Frances Katzen, an agent with Douglas Elliman, said she's had several clients lately asking for homes equipped with a wine fridge.

"The amenity packages that used to be considered luxuries are now an absolute staple to new projects and may include separate bike storage from regular storage, gym, and roof deck," said Katzen.

Other amenities that Katzen has notice cropping up lately are downstairs wine cellar, Abigail Michaels concierge services, pet spas, billiard and gaming rooms, tennis courts and pools.