

The New York Times

The Year In Real Estate

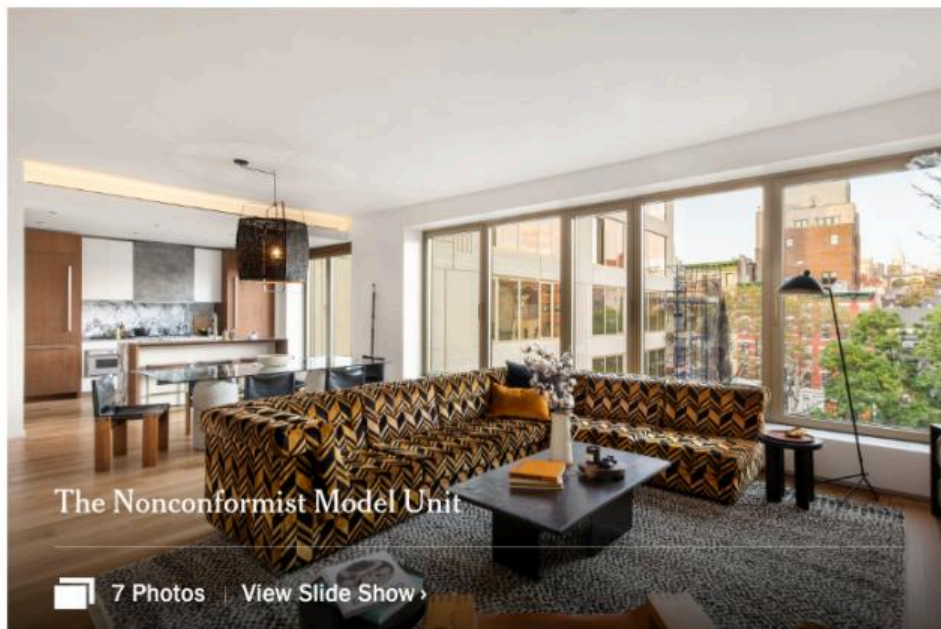


Illustration by Peter and Maria Hoey

Published Dec. 27, 2019
Updated Dec. 29, 2019



There were highs and lows for New York real estate this year. Sales records were broken, but the overall market hit the brakes, even as mortgage rates stayed low. Design took center stage in many new developments, and Hudson Yards opened to great fanfare.



Evan Joseph

No More Plain Vanilla

By Tim McKeough

Before putting a home on the market, sellers have traditionally been advised to make the space as plain as possible — avoiding bright colors, bold patterns and any sort of provocative furniture or art — to appeal to the largest possible pool of buyers. And developers have largely followed suit, creating model units with decidedly safe design schemes, awash in neutral colors.

Not anymore.

As new condominiums languish on the market, that thinking is beginning to change, and the past year has seen a number of developers hiring cutting-edge designers to create eye-catching model units that are anything but generic.

At [One Manhattan Square](#), the developer Extell commissioned [Anna Karlin](#), a trendsetting designer based on the [Lower East Side](#), to design no less than 11 model units bursting with energetic hues and sculptural furniture.

One living room is coated in pink paint, with a curvaceous multi-armed sconce to match. Another has a glossy green ceiling. Yet another has a scalloped aqua credenza topped by an arched shelving unit filled with shapely, striped ceramics.

“People’s eyes are a lot more educated than they get given credit for,” Ms. Karlin said.



Anna Karlin designed 11 model units with energetic hues at One Manhattan Square. Evan Joseph

Her designs, she explained, are meant to reflect the lives of 11 individual characters: “I think people are excited to see spaces like that.”

For Extell, the goal was to create model units that would do more than merely look nice. “In this market, we have to do something that makes us stand out, because people are really shopping around,” said Christina Medina, the project’s sales director. “We want to be memorable. There’s nothing about any of these models that is ho-hum or ordinary.”

Just as unexpected was a model unit the designer [Timothy Godbold](#) created for Magnum Real Estate Group and Real Estate Equities Corporation at [196 Orchard Street](#). The walls of the master bedroom were lined with dark charcoal-brown Ultrasuede, and among the furnishings was a chunky brass-and-smoked-mirror credenza from the 1980s, so “you get that Tom Ford, Halston kind of luxe vibe,” Mr. Godbold said.

It was “the perfect opportunity to try something new,” he added, “rather than having people walk in and see the same thing.”

At [75 Kenmare Street](#), a condo with interiors by Lenny Kravitz’s firm [Kravitz Design](#), DHA Capital directed the musician to create a no-holds-barred model unit. The resulting living room has a plush sofa with gold-and-black chevron-patterned upholstery, a graphic black-and-white wall mural by the artist Chris Wyrick and a rug that recalls leopard skin.

“It’s attention-grabbing, and it gets people to notice,” said John Gomes, an agent at Douglas Elliman Real Estate, who is leading sales for the project with Fredrik Eklund.

The idea is that in a sea of condo sameness, “you become memorable,” he said. “Even if it’s not to one’s particular style or taste, they can still appreciate the fact that it’s different and fresh.”

Daniel Hollander, the managing principal of DHA Capital, said he had no hesitation about offering buyers something distinctly different.

“In our case, the results speak for themselves, because we’re over 60 percent sold,” he said. “I don’t think plain vanilla cuts it anymore.”



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At 75 Kenmare Street, Leroy Kravitz's firm Kravitz Design created a model unit with a custom sofa covered in gold and black chevron-patterned upholstery and a rug reading leopard skin.

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The living room includes a graphic mural by the artist Chris Wyrick.

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