

STANDING OUT – DEVELOPERS ARE USING MORE CUNNING DEVICES TO SET THEIR BUILDINGS APART FROM THE REST

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LOOK through any listings for apartments, homes, offices or buildings, and you'll be bombarded by photos, fonts and logos.

Whether in print or online, there isn't an ad today that doesn't try to distinguish one property from another through imagery.

Those that create and sell buildings also pull out every trick at their disposal to lure potential buyers and renters, just like they were offering honey to Pooh.

No longer relegated to a mere thank you at the grand opening, prominent architects are being brought in as special gladiators in the ring of marketing. Whether Robert A.M. Stern, Richard Meier, Philippe Starck, Charles Gwathmey, Costas Kondylis or Philip Johnson, the architects become as much a part of the packaging as the doorknobs. For Related Companies, Gwathmey created his first entire apartment tower in the city. The undulating building, called One Astor Place, takes advantage of its prominent location on the south-side of the major Astor Place intersection in the East Village that is also bounded by Lafayette Street and the Bowery.

It was also important to the land owner, Cooper Union, to host a building that represented excellent architecture.

But even designing a building is often not enough to catch the attention of the fickle buyers: architectural jobs are split with some "names" creating layouts, some the interiors, some just a lobby, some the model apartments and some the future furniture possibilities.

Philippe Starck's Yoo Group, for instance, was brought in to create catalogs of furniture he liked that were designed by him and others for 15 Broad Street.

But even an eye-popping name can get some help from uber-marketers like Louise Sunshine.

She recently invented the concept of “cubic feet” to describe the rooftop penthouse that Charles Gwathmey added on top of the Windsor Park condo conversion for Yizak Tessler.

“We’re selling by the cubic foot because there are sooo many cubic feet,” Sunshine said. “There are double barreled ceilings that go to 25-feet and there are no words to describe this.”

Tessler explained: “It’s the not the same as if you buy 4,000 square feet that is nine feet high. It’s a different space. So how can you describe this?”

“The building’s cachet has already brought in sales of \$1,400 a foot, and Tessler is now using Gwathmey to design three penthouses on another one of his conversion projects at 260 Park Avenue South which is almost otherwise sold-out.

“These penthouses will be selling from \$5 million to \$7 million,” Tessler said. “Their 12-foot high ceilings are beauties, but it doesn’t call for ‘cubic feet.’”

New York City once tried to impose “bulk zoning,” and the Westchester suburban Village of Scarsdale was also considering a cubic foot zoning concept, until they all realized no one could easily figure it out. But to market and get more for a penthouse? Now that’s branding at its finest.

Sunshine has also brought art into the residential picture, creating a gallery in her offices at the Fuller Building at Madison Ave. and 57th Street – which is coincidentally filled with galleries, and someday could be a residential building itself. Sunshine galleries allow prospective unit buyers to see how art fits into their life as they are married with model apartments.

In December, Sunshine took a booth at Art Basal in Miami to show off apartments in projects that varied from Richard Meier’s 165 Charles Street to the Cesar and Rafael Pellidesigned One Beacon Court over the Bloomberg Tower, and caused a stir in the international market.

Art is also used to distinguish commercial buildings and their tenancies. There is nothing like a splashy piece of art – or even a plasma TV – to set the tenor for a building and make a lobby come alive.

“The personality of the owner gets represented in the art, and it’s very much the brand of the company,” said Barbara Koz Paley who runs Art Assets.

Paley runs art programs that typically change on a yearly basis on behalf of office owners from Taconic Partners to Hines who “rent” from artists who don’t always give up their works yet enjoy an income from their art.

Changing leasing agents often changes the perception in the market place, said Elizabeth Houley of Newmark & Co.

To lease offices in a newly assigned project, such as the building at 489 Fifth Avenue owned by ELK Investors that recently hired Newmark, Houley says, “It’s not rocket science. You have to understand the market and the changing dynamics, do your research, get smart on the area, and target market to the core group most likely to rent space in the building.”

To help distinguish “low-tech” brick apartment buildings that will never see the light of floor to ceiling glass curtain walls, architect Peter DeWitt tries to pump up the patterns. But he admits he is limited by the workers.

“I try to do bold patterns with the bricks,” said DeWitt, a principal in DeWitt Tishman Architects who has designed several new apartment projects in Jersey City. “I’ve done soldier courses [where they stand on the narrow end],” he said.

“But forget diamond patterns -the masons don’t want to think about it.”