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REAL ESTATE

Over-the-Top Amenities: Sweating the Details

By PENELOPE GREEN



At the Cast Iron House, a late-19th-century landmark in TriBeCa reimaged by Shigeru Ban, the Pritzker Prize-winning architect, into 13 shiny white condos, you will find another flourish designed by Mr. Ban: a Turkish-style hamam, complete with a plunge pool and a “deluge” shower. (We’ll circle back to that deluge later.)

Farther west, another century-old landmark, 443 Greenwich Street, which has been reworked by the architecture firm CetraRuddy, also counts among its abundant amenities a glistening green glass-tile hamam that Nancy Ruddy, a principal with the company who was inspired by visits to Istanbul, described as “having a primordial feeling about it.”

Uptown, the hamam at the Halcyon, a glass tower at East 51st Street, will sport tiers of heated marble. At 252 East 57th, the not-yet-built undulating glass

tower designed by SOM, with interior architecture by Daniel Romualdez, who has created interiors for Aerin Lauder, Tory Burch and Mick Jagger, there is another hamamlake space — in limestone, marble and porcelain tile. Instead of a plunge pool there is an “ice room” with a machine that makes “snow” you can spread on your body, and an enormous “relaxation room” where you can rest after these circulatory jolts.

“Older cultures know how this helps you,” Ms. Ruddy said. “This is a luxury you can’t have in your apartment.”

Home, it would appear, is where the hamam is. At least for the superrich.

For along with the Olympic-size pools, children’s playrooms designed by experts in early-childhood development, basketball courts, demonstration and

catering kitchens, lounges or “great rooms” with fireplaces, curated libraries, guest rooms, full-size gyms, spinning rooms and yoga studios, the hamam (pronounced hah-MOM) has joined the amenity package, as the brokers say, of the luxury development market. Or “super luxury” market, which is to say buildings where the price per square foot begins at about \$3,000.

No longer solely relegated to basements, these amenities (there has got to be a better word) are stretching out over tens of thousands of square feet above ground, in some cases on the prime real estate of a building’s higher floors, as is the case at 45 East 22nd, a glass wedge that will rise to nearly 800 feet. Indeed, the amenity with a view is its own proud category. At One57 — a building that broke the \$100 million barrier two weeks ago — the pool not only has a view of Carnegie Hall, but past performances are piped into the water, so you hear them as you swim.

“Most pools are underground,” said Jeannie Woodbrey, the senior sales associate there. “Even the pool at 15 C.P.W. is on a lower floor.”

Ian Bruce Eichner, the developer of 45 East 22nd Street, which has five floors of amenities, including what he called the Upper Club — a demonstration kitchen, catering kitchen, living room and dining room on what will be the building’s 54th floor — likened his amenity strategy to a bank shot in pool.

“It helps us set up the kind of dollars per square foot we’d like from our buyers,” he said. “It’s kind of an equalizer. If you’re in a one-bedroom at the bottom of the building, you get the same amenities as the guy who paid \$42 million for the top floor. I’m giving my prime real estate to an amenity space so I can get value from the bottom floors, too.”

Even the garages are gussied up. Not just private and mechanized, many have gated, covered driveways — or drive courts, as the one at 551 West 21st, designed by Norman Foster, is called. *Porte-cochère* is how the sales team at 252 East 57th describes its private entry, harking back to prewar buildings like the Apthorp. Its swirly center column is an SOM signature.

At 443 Greenwich Street, Ms. Ruddy has designed the garage to look like Grand Central Terminal, with arched ceilings with Guastavino-style tiles. Even the parking bays are tiled. For a garage, it is almost ravishing.

“This is no Icon garage,” as Richard Cantor, of Cantor-Pecorella Inc., who is handling sales there, said.

In the last boom, said Jonathan Miller, the president and chief executive of Miller Samuel, a real estate appraisal and consulting firm, “the amenities seemed to be more smoke and mirrors: the valet, the concierge and the sommelier. It was more window dressing for the upfront sale. In tough times, if there’s a problem or a change in the market, these things can be cut.”

But now, he continued, “because land prices and construction prices are so high, every one of these projects needs to break a new price record, so you reverse-engineer to make the project viable. You have to put in these amenities to justify the value of these record prices. So we’ve transitioned from a development boom that was service amenity-oriented to — and maybe this is your new word — infrastructure, an asset within the building that stays with the building.”

A note about terminology. The Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group’s research department divides the luxury market into three subcategories based on price per square foot: “luxury,” which it defines as \$2,300 to \$3,300 (443 Greenwich); “super luxury,” from \$3,300 to \$5,000; and “ultra luxury,” which is \$5,000 and up (One57 and 432 Park). Some developers chafe at these designations: The folks at 252 call their building “ultraluxury,” for its views, flourishes and amenities, though their prices average about \$3,000 a square foot.

For his part, Mr. Miller defines the luxury threshold as starting at \$1,800 a square foot, and eschews the word “ultra” in favor of “trophy,” he said, because the former term makes him think of “a bad ’70s apartment with gold-plated interiors and someone describing it as ‘classy.’ ”

It was a zoning quirk, however, that allowed Ziel Feldman, founder of HFZ Capital Group, the developer of the Halcyon, to put its amenities on the 21st and 22nd floors.

“We overlapped several zoning districts, and the easy answer is we got what’s called a ‘quality housing’ bonus, which allowed us to put them anywhere without buying air rights,” Mr. Feldman said. “It was free space.”

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The hamam, he added, just fit with the theme of

his building.

“Halcyon, by its nature, represents calm and serenity,” he said. “Hamams have been used for centuries as a calming tool.”

Although the Cast Iron House just happens to be across the street from Aire Ancient Baths, a spa designed like a Roman bath, Jourdan Krauss, the building’s developer, and Mr. Ban were “adamant,” Mr. Krauss said, about making their own private hamam. (Clearly, a certain version of bath culture is having a renaissance in New York City. But you have to ask yourself, how comfortable would you be getting naked with your neighbors?)

“We live in this frenetic city; it’s mayhem,” said Mr. Krauss, explaining why his team had researched ancient bath culture and rituals. “I wanted to create an oasis.”

O.K., what’s a deluge shower?

“You can imagine it as a type of a bucket and you pull a lever,” he said.

There is no hamam over at the Greenwich Lane, the 10-building complex with interiors designed by Thomas O’Brien now growing from the site of St. Vincent’s hospital. There is, however, a large pool among many, many other amenities that include a children’s playroom designed by a company that has created children’s museums.

“Because the development is geographically spread out like a college campus, there was a very natural parklike element running down the middle, and then all of that real estate running under the park,” said James Lansill, senior managing director at the Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group, which is handling sales there. “So we could put in a swimming pool that’s bigger than normal, because it wasn’t in the bottom of a tower.”

There is a golf simulator, but no basketball court and no bowling alley.

“That just never came up,” Mr. Lansill said of the bowling alley. “We did one in Downtown by Starck” — the Philippe Starck-designed condo in the financial district that was a touchstone of the last boom — “because there was this long, crazy tunnel” that was “the exact same length as a bowling alley.”

It was, Mr. Lansill believes, the first bowling alley in a condo, an opening salvo in what would become an amenity craze.

“Then all the developers went nuts, and there was

just this long list which backfired, because no one wanted to work out in those tiny gyms, and I don’t think anyone ever used those business centers,” he said. “The trend now has been to do more generously scaled and more meaningful amenities instead of just a list.”

Mr. Miller said his favorite thing to make fun of during the last boom was “the pet spa, which sounded like dogs lounging around the pool but was really a glorified slop sink in a closet in the basement somewhere.”

But this particular amenity, now called the pet wash or the dog grooming station at 252 East 57th Street, has not only survived, it has also come up in the world. At the Pierhouse in Brooklyn Bridge Park, the Toll Brothers development designed by Jonathan Marvel that just topped out at 130 feet and is the subject of a dispute about its height, the pet wash is no slop sink. It’s a windowed lounge overlooking the park designed by Mr. Marvel, the same architect who reimagined the Studio Museum in Harlem and St. Ann’s Warehouse, the performance space, with checkerboard tiles, outdoor furniture, lockers for treats, a coffee station and two professional dog showers.

“Essentially, it’s a really nice experience for both the animal and the owners,” Mr. Marvel said of the 350-square-foot space.

What to call it?

“I think it’s got to have a more descriptive name,” he said.

How about a dog hamam?
