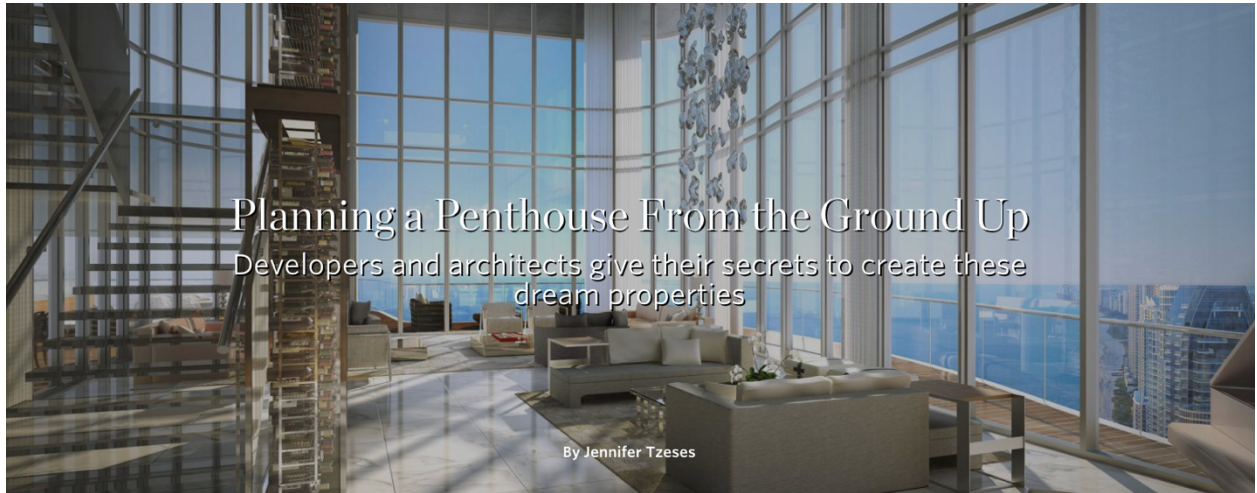


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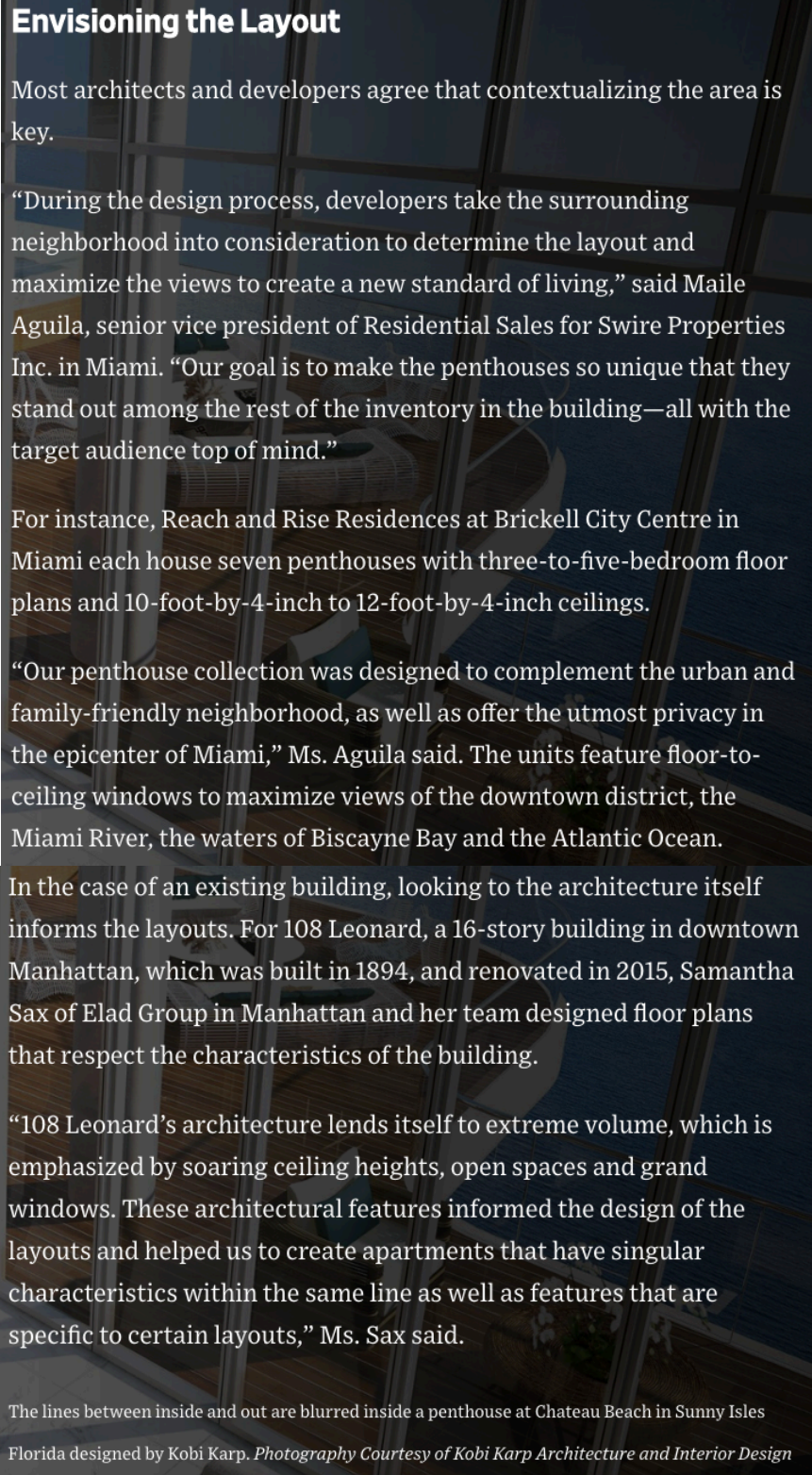


There's a lot that goes into designing a penthouse. Careful consideration of every element is key: the views, the layout, the style, the square footage, the amenities.

"Each project is a story," said Jordan Brill, partner at Magnum Real Estate Group in New York. "We use bricks, glass, stone and other materials in lieu of words. Our story ties into the neighborhood's history and we have a tremendous responsibility to ensure our design lives on for years to come."

And it's a story that begins even before the first brick is laid.





Envisioning the Layout

Most architects and developers agree that contextualizing the area is key.

“During the design process, developers take the surrounding neighborhood into consideration to determine the layout and maximize the views to create a new standard of living,” said Maile Aguila, senior vice president of Residential Sales for Swire Properties Inc. in Miami. “Our goal is to make the penthouses so unique that they stand out among the rest of the inventory in the building—all with the target audience top of mind.”

For instance, Reach and Rise Residences at Brickell City Centre in Miami each house seven penthouses with three-to-five-bedroom floor plans and 10-foot-by-4-inch to 12-foot-by-4-inch ceilings.

“Our penthouse collection was designed to complement the urban and family-friendly neighborhood, as well as offer the utmost privacy in the epicenter of Miami,” Ms. Aguila said. The units feature floor-to-ceiling windows to maximize views of the downtown district, the Miami River, the waters of Biscayne Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

In the case of an existing building, looking to the architecture itself informs the layouts. For 108 Leonard, a 16-story building in downtown Manhattan, which was built in 1894, and renovated in 2015, Samantha Sax of Elad Group in Manhattan and her team designed floor plans that respect the characteristics of the building.

“108 Leonard’s architecture lends itself to extreme volume, which is emphasized by soaring ceiling heights, open spaces and grand windows. These architectural features informed the design of the layouts and helped us to create apartments that have singular characteristics within the same line as well as features that are specific to certain layouts,” Ms. Sax said.

The lines between inside and out are blurred inside a penthouse at Chateau Beach in Sunny Isles Florida designed by Kobi Karp. *Photography Courtesy of Kobi Karp Architecture and Interior Design*



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Creating the Configuration

With so much space to work with, there are many ways to go with the design—loft style, designated rooms, multiple floors.

“This is something that is really defined by the footprint and height limits of the building at a particular site in conjunction with the program of the new development,” said Jeffrey Beers, a designer and founder of Jeffrey Beers International in New York. “Without real-world parameters and constraints, we would have literal castles in the sky rather than the smartly planned penthouse luxury in New York City.”

Yiannes Einhorn, principal of Grid Group in New York, favors an open-loft-style great room that provides a seamless flow for living and entertaining, with a more private space for bedrooms in a separate area of the residence. For a recently completed project on West 83rd Street in Manhattan, he chose a penthouse design that featured a lofty full-floor open plan on the main floor, and then a staircase leading up to a room that opened directly onto a private roof deck. “This allowed for an amazing indoor-outdoor entertaining space with a wet bar off the roof deck, but the flexibility for the buyers to use the space in a number of ways,” Mr. Einhorn said.



Manhattan's skyscrapers provide the backdrop for a penthouse at 277 Fifth designed by Jeffrey Beers. Photography by Colin Miller

Kobi Karp, founder and principal of Kobi Karp Architecture and Interior Design in Miami created a similar configuration—a one-story apartment with a rooftop terrace—for a client in Barcelona who wanted to take advantage of an existing skylight by the staircase.

“If he would have opted to build multiple stories, he would have had to sacrifice the natural light flooding in from the opening toward the interior of the home,” Mr. Karp said. “It’s these types of unique idiosyncrasies that often play a big role in determining whether to add multiple stories.”

“We blend the idea of being completely open with some divided rooms to give buyers a sense of livability,” said Lauren Witkoff, executive vice president of Witkoff Group, a New York City-based real estate investment and development company. “Walking into an entirely open space can be intimidating, so we show clients where the bedrooms and bathrooms would be, but keep the common areas loft style to ensure that sense of grandness.”

Creating layouts that lend themselves to combinations or changes gives buyers flexibility to customize their home, Ms. Sax said.

“Whether our buyers are looking for an extensive amount of space or want to transform a room to a movie theater or gym, our objective is to give them the flexibility to realize their vision,” she said.

Meanwhile, there is an advantage to having a two-story penthouse—it allows for double-height areas for entertaining, displaying art or having a grand staircase. “Penthouse buyers want a unique home they can show off and entertain friends and family, and having double-height areas allows for that,” said Lee Hallman, head of design for London-based Qatari Diar Europe.

Views, naturally, are one of the most important features a penthouse has to offer.

A penthouse should “always be designed to have the most optimal surrounding views,” Mr. Karp said. “Views should be based not only on the surroundings themselves, but also on the rise and set of the sun. Solar study diagrams teach us how the sun will affect a location based on its coordinates and the shape of the building itself.”

Gil Dezer, president of Dezer Development in South Florida, typically arranges the overall layout by orienting the main living, master bedroom and master bath facing prime views. For example, the four-level penthouse at the Porsche Design Tower in Sunny Isles Beach, Florida, features soaring double-height windows in the main living spaces on each floor with views of the ocean and the city.



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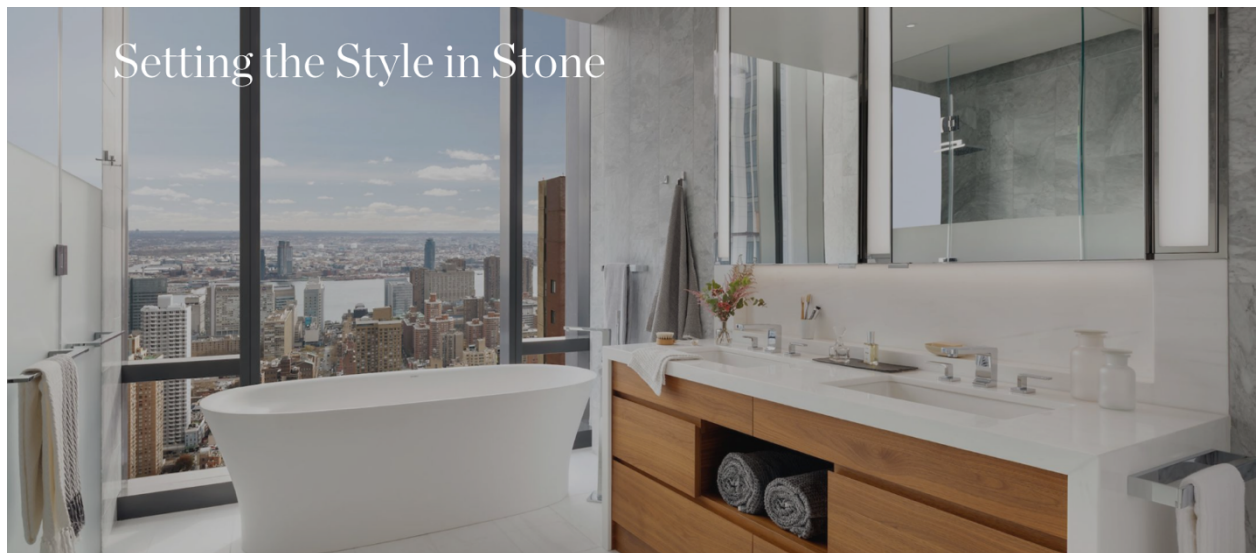


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Location and views can also help determine the style of a space. For example, Mr. Beers and his team looked to the strength of the building's architecture and the panoramic views within the context of the NoMad neighborhood to influence the interior style of the penthouses at 277 Fifth Ave in Manhattan. The "interior design provided a modern sophisticated urban style with warmth to complement the views," Mr. Beers said.

History also plays a part. At 100 Barclay in the Tribeca neighborhood of New York City, for example, the style incorporates the bones inherited from the building itself by paying homage to the Art Deco design while infusing new, fresh elements that make it current but also sustainable, Mr. Brill said.

In order for Chelsea Barracks in London to seamlessly meld into the neighborhood, Mr. Hallman made a conscious decision for the building to be architecturally sympathetic to Belgravia's history and heritage. "We knew we wanted large in-set penthouses and were very careful when designing them, so they respected the past while still being forward looking. In our penthouses, traditional British elements are combined with modern accents throughout," Mr. Hallman said. To be considerate of the neighborhood and the local architecture, Mr. Hallman's team used materials such as bronze metal and Portland Stone "to ensure that the penthouses gently join the historic fabric of Belgravia."

"In a new development, the penthouse finishes and flooring typically reflect the materials used throughout the building, so the design remains cohesive," said Fredrik Eklund, Founder of The Eklund | Gomes Team at Douglas Elliman Real Estate in New York and Beverly Hills, California. "However, the penthouse will often include upgrades and other special features that make it unique from the other residences."



Glass walls afford show-stopping 360-degree views of Manhattan in the penthouse of 111 Murray Street. Photography Courtesy of 111 Murray Street



Developers always go a notch above whatever finishes are used in the rest of the building, Ms. Aguila said. “We include elevated appliances, higher quality materials and a range of color options—all to differentiate the penthouses from the rest of the building,” she said.

At Reach and Rise Residences at Brickell City Centre, for example, the penthouses’ kitchens include modern Italian kitchen cabinets by Italkraft, the highest line of premium Bosch appliances and European-style oversized, stainless steel sinks. “We also tripled the size of the temperature-controlled undercounter wine storage, which can fit up to 200 bottles,” Ms. Aguila said.

Best-in-class appliances are paramount to setting penthouses apart. “We try to add on appliance options that are not included in the appliance package for the other units or we upgrade the size of the appliances being offered,” Ms. Sax said. This may include a coffee station with a professional coffee machine or a grand wine fridge.

And in some cases, bespoke amenities go beyond even the amenities themselves to include once-in-a-lifetime experiences. For example, at Residences by Armani Casa in Miami, the purchaser of the penthouse gets a private meeting with Giorgio Armani to select the finishes for their unit.