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Woolworth Renovations are a Perfect Blend of the Past and the Future

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Impressions 23,917,718



Woolworth Building

The Woolworth Building still has plenty of views of everywhere. When Larry Silverstein built 30 Park Pl. at the other end of the block, I thought the Woolworth Building conversion sales were toast.

Boy, was I wrong.

If the view isn't 360 degrees, it's certainly 355 degrees, from what I observed during a recent tour of the marvelously restored edifice.

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Developer Ken Horn, of Alchemy Properties, is true to his company name when it comes to renovating old structures. And the Woolworth Building conversion is a doozy.

It's what happens when you completely gut and remodel a 105-year-old landmark structure, and the basement wires are a mass of spaghetti.

His office has five people on site, while CNY is running construction 24/7, so Horn can get his Temporary Certificates of Occupancy in November — knock on wood.

History lives within. Blue, white and gilded ceiling panels from Woolworth's private 42nd floor office have almost all been saved and are being restored or replicated for the residential lobby, which will be at 2 Park Pl.

The building's unique terra cotta flowers are being replicated and glazed with their original pastel colors by Buffalo-based Boston Valley Terra Cotta. The 3,500 one-foot squares are being replaced at the breathtaking cost of \$22 million. Then again, everything about the project is breathtaking.

To gain more interior space, two elevator shafts were cut off to just serve the lower office portion of the building, gaining 400 square feet per floor in the tower. With sales pricing averaging \$3,300 per square foot — that's \$1.28 million extra per floor.

At the end of June, two men on a dangling scaffold were going floor to floor fixing and replacing chipped terra cotta pieces and cleaning up debris. "We haven't seen a single pigeon or any other bird," says Horn, staring out from the kitchen of the 38th floor, three-bedroom model that has an interior decor by Alan Tanksley.

In the adjacent two-bedroom unit, designer Eve Robinson used a colorful palette that matches the terra cotta flowers.

At a recent viewing party, Sotheby International agent Joshua Judge, who with colleague Stan Ponte are handling sales, says they had to shoo out the brokers who had lingered an extra hour.

It's not just the mesmerizing views, but the entire project. All the units and common areas, designed by Thierry Despont, have the elegance of classical detail with a modern edge. Over every cooktop is a silver replica of the original "W" panels found over the old elevators. "We tried to make them contemporary yet respectful of history," Horn said.

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En trend white open kitchens have soft white Calacatta Caldia marble countertops and backsplashes. The Miele fridge and just as large separate freezer in the three-bedroom are covered with the white custom Dada cabinetry by the Molteni Group. The two-bedroom has one fridge with a lower freezer.

Horn's wife tells him she will learn to cook if they move in, he says, but so far, he's keeping his options open, especially when there would be so many great restaurants nearby as temptation.

Cabinet panels have frame molding while pulls are chrome and everything is laid out in a thoughtful way with lots of room and softened marble edges.

The generously proportioned "A" line on the east side is a \$9.5 million, three-bedroom unit with 3,282 square feet of space. The similarly expansive \$7.55 million two-bedroom unit with 2,548 square foot "B' line looks west, but both also have north and south views. Higher up, just 46B is left of all the 1,296-square-foot, one-bedrooms priced at \$4.575 million.

Meanwhile, a buyer already walked into the two-bedroom model and said he wanted it, along with the furnishings. Horn convinced the man to get a new installation from the designer so he can move everything to another model unit.

Some buyers are using the second or third bedroom for a study, or taking down living room walls. With a 25- to 35-foot long living rooms already, it's hard to see why.

Along with single units, two entire floors have also been sold, Horn said, with buyers combining the units. Some of the other floors have outdoor space as well.

Underground, amenities include a wine cellar for each unit, a tasting room and the restoration of Woolworth's 55-foot long private lap pool.

The Gilbert lounge — named for building architect, Cass Gilbert, will be located on the 29th floor, while the 30th floor will host a fitness facility.

The Pinnacle, the multi-story pyramid that tops the building, has been gutted, and one of its many stories removed to create a 2,400- square-foot floor with a 23-foot high ceiling.

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Until the private internal elevator is installed, ladders now connect the other floors. "Light is just pouring in," said Judge.

With several people now circling that \$110 million unit, Horn has his fingers crossed that someone will plunk down a deposit to ensure they can design this townhouse-in-the-sky in the "Cathedral in the Sky" to their own taste and lifestyle.

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