

Friday, June 13, 2008

By Jason Sheftell

Alexi-go

The height of New York luxury is the sole goal for this development team

Unlike any other developer, the New York-based Alexico Group wants to curate the way the luxurious set lives. They see furniture as art; the home as statement of an owner's personal style.

The development group, which built 165 Charles St. and the Alex Hotel on E. 45th St. has a roster of architects and designers that reads like a who's who of the world's best - Richard Meier, David Rockwell, Costas Kondylis, and now, Jacques Grange, who some consider the greatest living interior designer.

"We will always try to be one step ahead of everyone else building luxury housing," says Izak Senbahar, one of Alexico's founders. "This is not a gimmick. The vision of this company is to ensure our projects are built to perfection."

Their most recent project, the \$300 million refurbishment of The Mark Hotel on E. 77th St. and Madison Ave., brings the Paris-based Grange to a New York co-op project for the first time. Grange's custom furniture pieces are made specifically for the project and will never be available anywhere else in the world.

With a completion date for early fall, The Mark contains a black-and-white marble lobby floor so chic the half-hotel, half-residence might replace the Carlyle Hotel as the upper East Side's most respected socialite stamping ground.

The fashion design duo Dolce and Gabbana recently checked out the hotel's \$60 million penthouse, complete with a sky-lit conservatory, a 2,400-square-foot terrace, a 26-foot-high copper cupola for a living room, and a personal elevator that takes you two floors to the private roof. Two bidders are currently vying for the property, including a Russian oligarch. Whether it's glitz or gluttony, The Mark has buzz.

Thank Louise Sunshine for that. The

The dining area (below left) and master bedroom (below right) with furniture designed specifically for The Mark Hotel by Jacques Grange.



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grande dame of New York City real estate recently signed on as Alexico's director of development and marketing chief. Sunshine, who has 30 years' experience marketing high-end New York properties, started out as Donald Trump's marketing head. She coined the phrase "Five-star Living" when she marketed the Residences at Time Warner Center.

After selling the Sunshine Group, the world's leading co-op marketing sales company, Sunshine is back as an entrepreneur driving Alexico toward a level of real estate luxury that even New York hasn't seen before. She introduced Alexico to Grange, ensuring the designer's life partner and Parisian gallery owner Pierre Passebon gets to select the other designers creating furniture pieces for The Mark. Ten other world-famous designers created signature pieces for the hotel, whose food and beverage department will be run by Sant Ambroeus, the next-door patisserie.

So who's footing the bill? Senbahar and partner Simon Elias are the developers who hired Sunshine and spearhead these properties that combine architecture, design, location and almost royalty-like lifestyle.

Senbahar has more patience than most Buddhist monks. For 13 years he bought up piece-of-land by piece-of-land on E. 51st St. When he was finished land-banking, Senbahar built the Grand Beekman, a 32-story building that was the first new tower residence built in the East 50s in 25 years. "When I come to a meeting, I don't bring my BlackBerry," he says. "When you have me, you have me. I need to focus on every detail. The people I work with deserve that attention."

An ex-commodity trader, Senbahar turned down a job with Goldman Sachs in London to stay in New York and eventually to become a real estate developer, learning the business from the ground up in the construction trades. He met his partner, Simon Elias in the gym of United Nations Plaza, where they both lived at the time.

"See, amenities really do work," says Elias, a hotel developer who oversees the company's five-star hospitality business. "We became friends in the gym and started talking real estate. I was like who is this crazy guy who waited 13 years to put a building together? You have to take risks as a developer. I liked that. We became partners."

An admitted "wannabe architect," Senbahar's office mixes novels, design

coffee-table books and yacht brochures with stacks of documents and architectural plans. He and Sunshine argued for days over whether the color of an ottoman in the Mark model apartment was maroon, purple or shockingly pink. He moved a sofa 3 inches over to be better centered with the television.

"Some developers out there just bring their own tastes into their projects," he says. "You can't do that. I think what will the person who buys here like. And no one can hate anything in your buildings. Then they will buy elsewhere."

Elias is reserved, almost funny. Nothing gets by him. He thinks New York is underserved when it comes to high-designed luxury hotels. The two of them are so art- and design-conscious, their offices are in the Artistic & Design Building on E. 58th St. Senbahar's home overlooks the Guggenheim Museum. The sales office for the Mark Hotel is part art gallery and part co-op sales center.

"We are not mass producers," says Senbahar, who was born in Istanbul. "We have the time to build things right. I like pointing to buildings and telling people I built that."

Senbahar doesn't worry about competition either.

"We are not building commodities," he says. "Developers do not all build the same thing. I don't have to worry about up and down markets either. If you build it right, someone will have the money to afford it."

Sunshine pulls no punches, and has a flair for the dramatic. It was her idea to make The Gallerie Mark a living, breathing art space. They've held two shows since its opening. Fashion designer Tory Burch attended a recent dinner for The Mark.

"These people have the opportunity to purchase a home designed by someone world renowned for having the most exquisite taste," she says matter-of-factly. "This is a time when the environment, the furnishings, the design, is just as important as a painting on the wall."

Fifty percent sold, The Mark has 858-square-foot studios furnished and designed by Grange starting at \$2 million. A 3,183-square-foot unfurnished three-bedroom recently sold for \$16 million. The Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group handles sales.

According to Sunshine, long-term Carlyle Hotel residents have bought at The Mark, updating their lifestyle to



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Middle: Gallerist Pierre Passebon (l.) and designer Jacques Grange at The Mark sales gallery.

Bottom: A sales and marketing meeting at Alexico's E. 58th St. From l. to r., Louise Sunshine, Izak Senbahar and Simon Elias

the technologically advanced Creston System that controls light and sounds in your entire apartment at The Mark versus the old-fashioned buzzers at the Carlyle. That's not all that has crossed the street. James Sherwin, the Carlyle's former manager, will run the hotel portion of the project.

In addition to The Mark, Alexico is marketing the Laurel on E. 67th St., a building with a triathlon gym and two pools priced at less than similar buildings with less-ornate finishes. They recently bought the Flatotel Hotel on E. 51st St. with plans to turn it into another luxury property. Alexico will turn a Tribeca property on Leonard St., still under wraps, into one of New York's architectural wonders. Plans are expected to be released this fall.

"This is what we do," says Elias. "Buildings are art to us."