

The highest-priced new apartment building in the history of New York—indeed, at glass tower. It's architect Robert A. M. Stern's 15 Central Park West, an ingenious ho where apartments have been snapped up by hotshot hedge-fund managers, establish Costas. From the marble-columned lobby to the wine cellar and pool, PAUL



FOR DETAILS, SEE CREDITS PAGE

# The King of Ce



roughly \$2 billion in sales, the most lucrative in the world—isn't a sleek, one-of-a-kind image to the classic Candela-designed apartment buildings on Park and Fifth Avenues and financial titans, and celebrities such as Sting, Denzel Washington, and Bob GOLDBERGER examines the art, as well as the limits, of Stern's grand nostalgia

An aerial photograph of Central Park in Manhattan, showing the dense greenery of the park in the foreground and middle ground, with a dense skyline of skyscrapers and apartment buildings in the background under a blue sky with light clouds.

**PARK PALACE**

Set at the southwest corner of Central Park, 15 Central Park West (far left) was built on the most expensive site per square foot in Manhattan.

# Central Park West



uring the frenetic building spree of the last decade, when architects and developers seemed willing to try just about anything to get their projects noticed in the hyperactive Manhattan luxury-condominium market, buildings tended to fall into two categories: either they were based on the premise that an architect's job is to invent something that you have never seen before, or they were not. Most of the buildings that have gotten attention lately have been in the first category, sleek glass condominiums by the likes of Richard Meier, Jean Nouvel, Charles Gwathmey, and Herzog and de Meuron that nobody could mistake for anything but new, one-of-a-kind creations, the sorts of places where apartments sold for unbelievable amounts of money to people who live in them maybe a few weeks out of every year. There have been round towers, square towers, blue towers, and green ones, not to mention towers that

to follow their celebrated grandfather, the original William Zeckendorf, into bankruptcy. Zeckendorf the First, who put together the deal for the United Nations site and gave I. M. Pei his start, was notoriously leveraged, and his architectural adventures ultimately brought him down. His son, also named William Zeckendorf, revived the business, but his success has been eclipsed by the grandsons, who have ridden the condominium boom by reaching for ever larger portions of what seemed, for a while, like a market that could only keep on going up. The Zeckendorf brothers liked to build one thing at a time, and after making a lot of money erecting a brick-and-limestone tower at 515 Park Avenue, to which the architect Frank Williams had given a superficial gloss of architectural detail vaguely reminiscent of traditional, pre-World War II apartments, the brothers realized that there was gold to be mined in looking back, not forward, especially when you were building for the very rich, and that the somewhat clunky cornices and pediments at 515 Park were only the beginning of what they might do if they devoted themselves totally to the idea of re-creating a Manhattan apartment house of old.

In New York, the great apartment houses of the 1920s, buildings the cognoscenti know so well that they identify them only by numbers such as "834" (834 Fifth Avenue), "778" (778 Park Avenue), "1040" (1040 Fifth Avenue), and, the noblest of them all, "740" (740 Park Avenue), which happens to have been built by James T. Lee, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis's grandfather, have a kind of holy aura that comes, I think, from their nearly perfect equilibrium of social status and understated architectural quality. These buildings aren't flashy. They are quiet, and solid, and proper. The rooms are large and the layouts gracious, and there is nothing in the way any of these buildings is designed

## THE ZECKENDORFS FIGURED OUT THAT NOTHING APPEALS TO RICH PEOPLE LIKE SOMETHING NEW THAT DOESN'T LOOK TOO NEW.

swirl and towers that look as if they were disintegrating, each of them known as much by its architect's name as by its address. And then, as if inspired by the work of these celebrity architects, a whole other group of real-estate developers, the kind who like to refer to buildings as "product," started turning out their own glass apartment towers, much more mundane but in such quantity that you could easily think that glass, which once signified an office building, had now become the material of choice for luxury apartment living in New York.

As all of that was happening, the developers Arthur and William Lie Zeckendorf hired Robert A. M. Stern, who told them that what he thought New York really needed was a luxury building that looked more like the old-fashioned ones, not less. The Zeckendorfs were going against the grain, but they believed they had a reason to. They were putting up a building on the most expensive site in Manhattan, a full block facing Central Park between 61st and 62nd Streets, half of which contained the faded Mayflower Hotel, and the other half, facing Broadway, a vacant lot. The Zeckendorfs had purchased the land from the Goulandris shipping family for \$401 million in 2004—an amount that at the time seemed so outrageous that people wondered if the Zeckendorf brothers didn't have some strange death wish, some desire

that tries, even remotely, to surprise. The best apartment-house architect of the day was Rosario Candela, an Italian immigrant who seemed to know instinctively that the rich wanted to live in handsome, serene places that they did not have to work hard to understand. Before the glass curtain-wall craze, developers of luxury buildings would frequently advertise their new apartments with claims that they evoked the spirit of pre-World War II buildings such as Candela's, claims that were almost always greatly exaggerated, in part because the developers had no intention of replicating the high ceilings and generous rooms of older buildings, and in part because their architects didn't really understand Candela anyway.

That was not Stern's problem. A wildly productive architect, scholar, and teacher—he has been dean of the Yale School of Architecture for the last decade, while at the same time running a 300-person architectural firm and producing several encyclopedic volumes on the architecture of New York City—Stern has made a career out of paying homage to the city's architecture of the 20s and 30s; he knows the classic buildings as well as most real-estate brokers. He sees himself, he has said, as a portraitist, as an artist whose work comes from putting his own gloss on what he sees in front of him, not from creating out of whole

POWER HOUSE

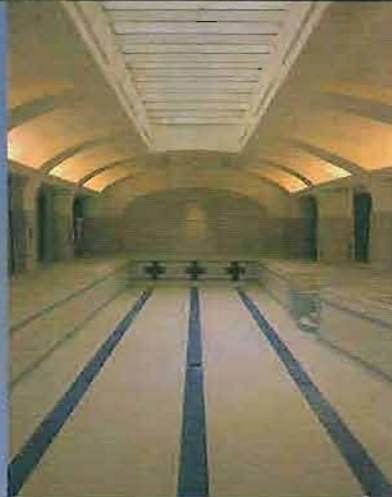
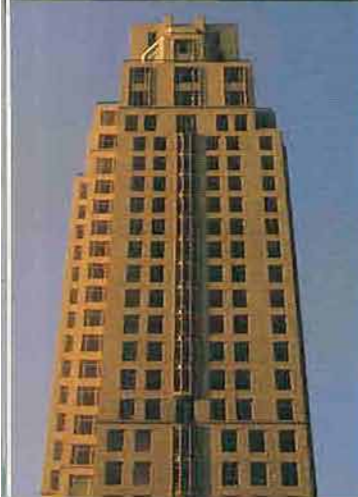
The exterior of 15 Central Park West was covered with more than 85,000 pieces of limestone, which cost millions of dollars more than standard brick.





## INSIDERS' VIEW

Architect Robert A. M. Stern stands on the concierge desk at 15 Central Park West; *center*, the view east from the top-floor penthouse, overlooking Central Park; *bottom left*, the building's 35-story tower, which stands behind the 19-story front section; *bottom right*, the lap pool; *opposite*, developers William Lie Zeckendorf and Arthur Zeckendorf under the arches on the balcony of the top-floor penthouse.



cloth. In an early monograph, published in 1981, Stern, who was born in 1939 and grew up in Brooklyn, recounted traveling to Manhattan. "I became an architect because I loved the buildings of my city, New York, and imagined one day that I would make ones like them. . . . The New York of my youth is to this day the principal subject of all my work in architecture," he wrote.

The Zeckendorfs initially asked six architects to show them ideas for their new building site. Most of them came up with fairly conventional, modern slabs. Stern produced something else entirely: a two-part invention with a 19-story front section on Central Park West that mimics buildings from the 1920s almost exactly, complete with terraced setbacks; behind it rises a tower decorated with motifs from the architecture of that decade, a somewhat strained attempt to make a contemporary slab look genteel. (The top is a variation on Candela's design for 1040 Fifth Avenue, blown up in scale and raised 35 stories over the street.) In between the two sections, Stern put a formal entry drive and a low, glass-enclosed rotunda with a copper dome to serve as a lobby and tie the two buildings together. Whatever you might say about the tower, there was no small amount of urban ingenuity to Stern's overall design, since it managed to exist on two scales at once: the modest scale of an older New York in the front, relating to the street, and the bigger scale of a contemporary high-rise in the back, related to the skyline. You could think that the front was done for tradition and the back for profit, since Stern squeezed 135 apartments into the tower, more than twice as many as there are in the shorter section. (There are 201 units in total, each with from one to eight bedrooms.)

**A**s things turned out, the whole place was for profit, every inch of it. The building quickly gained a reputation as the favored place for young hedge-fund

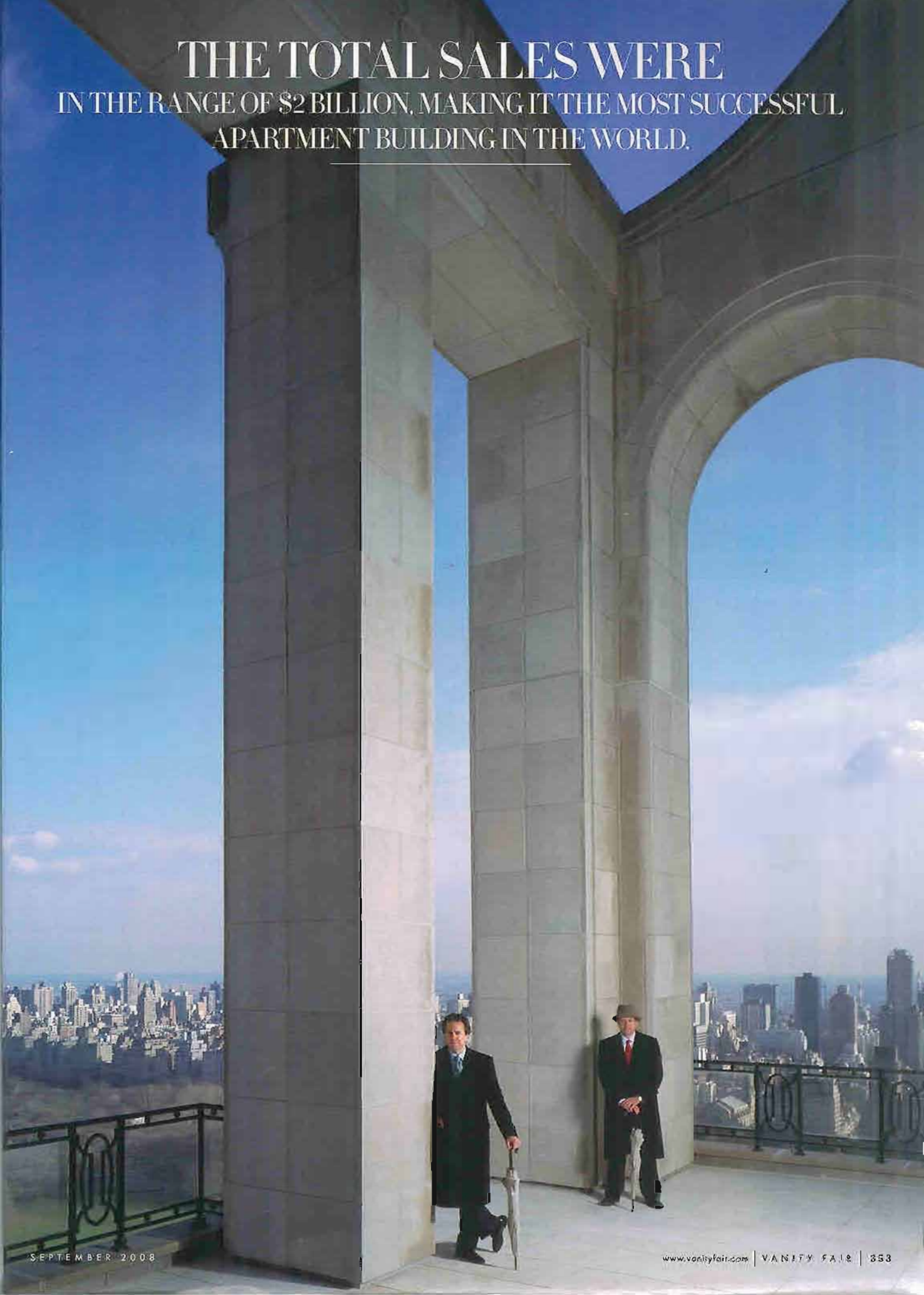
managers with lots of new money to burn and older financial types who had tired of their apartments on the Upper East Side. Former Citigroup C.E.O. Sandy Weill, who had been living on Fifth Avenue, bought a full-floor penthouse in the front section (which was dubbed, in a nod to the favored old-money term for apartment buildings, "the House"); Lloyd Blankfein, C.E.O. of Goldman Sachs, which had helped finance the building, took a big corner duplex apartment (several other Goldman executives also bought apartments

for themselves); and the hedge-fund executive Daniel Loeb bought a big place at the top of the tower with a 700-square-foot terrace. The building attracted a smattering of celebrities, including Sting, Norman Lear, Denzel Washington, and Bob Costas, but among all the hedge-fund types they may well feel like the poor relations. A handful of foreigners, such as Zhang Xin and Pan Shiyi, who run the largest real-estate-development firm in Beijing, bought places at 15 Central Park West, too. But the striking thing was the extent to which the building attracted New Yorkers who were ready for a change and didn't want to live in a tower of glass.

The Zeckendorfs had figured out that nothing appeals to people, particularly rich people, like



THE TOTAL SALES WERE  
IN THE RANGE OF \$2 BILLION, MAKING IT THE MOST SUCCESSFUL  
APARTMENT BUILDING IN THE WORLD.



## Supermodels

lionaire Peter Morton for the past two years, though she refuses to say who is the father of her almost-two-year-old son, Augustin. As for working, she says, "I have a better pace now. Less comes to me, but I get to choose. And I'm not globe-trotting like I used to, without a life."

Stephanie is also picky about which jobs she takes. "You have to protect your image; plus, I have four kids, so it has to be something I'll enjoy doing. Or something that has a good paycheck at the end, so that I can buy myself a nice piece of art." Her husband is one of the leading collectors of contemporary art, and Stephanie has commissioned a series of portraits of herself by such well-known artists as Francesco Clemente, Julian Schnabel, Eric Fischl, David Salle, Kenny Scharf, Donald Baechler, and Jeff Koons. "It wasn't my idea," she says, "because I'm very conscious of being too narcissistic, and I don't think I'm narcissistic at all. In fact, I think I'm the opposite. I hate looking in the mirror."

Claudia, too, has developed a taste for art, calling herself "a small collector." She told me

that, instead of giving her a ring when he proposed, Matthew Vaughn presented her with an Ed Ruscha painting of the words MARRY ME. Modeling, she says, has been "so great that if I had to start over again I would. I've kept all my clothes. I have a hangar that is normally made for helicopters, and I've got all my clothes in there. It's climate-controlled." Although she's much in demand these days, she restricts herself to assignments that don't require long periods away from her family. "It's not about money anymore; it's about working with people I really admire." Lately that has meant major advertising campaigns for Chanel, Ferragamo, and Louis Vuitton.

Indeed, the original supermodels seem to be making something of a comeback. Christy is working for Maybelline and Chanel again, and doing gratis ads for Bono's (Red) campaign and CARE. Linda and Naomi, who took the runway by storm at Dior's 60th-anniversary extravaganza in Paris last fall, also have big new contracts: Linda with Prada, Naomi with Citroën and SoBe Life Water. In addition, Naomi has been signed up to be the face of Yves Saint Laurent in print and on TV, despite her

much-reported contretemps with British Airways in April. Two weeks after her arrest for assaulting two police officers at Heathrow, she looked absolutely smashing in a gold brocade evening suit, strutting down the red carpet at a Metropolitan Opera premiere on the arm of YSL's young designer, Stefano Pilati. "Naomi has an almost untouchable power," says Pilati. "She radiates life and beauty and strength."

For many in the fashion business their return comes as a relief, after several years of anonymous, undernourished teenagers. To be fair, there have been some outstanding recent stars, such as Heidi Klum, Tyra Banks, Carmen Kass, Karolina Kurkova, and Natalia Vodianova, though Gisele Bündchen—with her curvaceous figure, \$35 million annual income, and sex-symbol boyfriends (Leonardo DiCaprio and Tom Brady)—is probably the only true supermodel around today. On the other hand, as Stephanie Seymour points out, the term has become so overused in the new century that now everybody's a supermodel. "It's very embarrassing," she says, "when you meet, like, a Russian prostitute, and she says she's a supermodel. And you're like, 'Hey, me too!'" □

## 15 Central Park West



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 352 something new that doesn't look too new. Stern laid out the apartments almost exactly like classic apartments from the 20s, with semi-private elevator halls, large entry foyers, formal dining rooms, and libraries. But they also have huge, eat-in kitchens instead of small kitchens and a warren of maid's rooms, and they have lots of big, marble bathrooms, and central air-conditioning. What Stern actually designed, it turned out, was a building in which every apartment looked like an old Park Avenue apartment after someone had renovated it. That held much more allure to an investment banker than a Richard Meier building with floor-to-ceiling glass.

The apartments were sold out before construction was completed this year, at the highest prices of any new building in the history of New York. The Zeckendorfs started selling them at roughly \$2,500

a square foot, which was already at the top of the New York market, and they kept raising the prices as construction went on, until the last apartments were sold at something approaching \$4,000 a square foot. The total sales were in the range of \$2 billion, making 15 Central Park West the most successful apartment building in the world—the architectural equivalent, you might say, of the highest-grossing movie in history. Loeb spent \$45 million on his penthouse, making it, at the time, the most expensive apartment ever sold in New York. The smaller apartments on the lower floors went for seven figures, but it didn't take much more than the desire for a third bedroom to push you into the low eight figures. Several apartments sold for more than \$20 million, and the average price was around \$9.5 million.

The exterior of 15 Central Park West is covered entirely in limestone, more than 85,000 pieces of it. Limestone was the preferred material for the most luxurious buildings of the pre-war era (740 Park and 834, 960, and 1040 Fifth are all limestone buildings), but it is rarely used today for more than decorative trim, which explains how Stern convinced the Zeckendorfs that it would be an easy way to set this building apart from its contemporaries and tie it in the public's mind to apartment houses that came three-quarters of a century before it. Covering the entire building in limestone cost a couple of million dollars more than brick would have, an amount that turned out, in the end, to be trivial—the Zeckendorfs probably

made it back on the sale of one apartment.

From a distance, however, the limestone doesn't look that different from concrete, which is one of the building's shortcomings. You can't really tell that the Zeckendorfs took the fancy route until you are right up close, which somewhat defeats the purpose. And while Stern has detailed the building with moldings and vertical rows of understated bay windows, the exterior is still surprisingly severe, and it lacks the strongly articulated base that distinguishes its neighbors farther up Central Park West. You might almost call it cold—but then again, nobody ever described 740 Park Avenue as warm and inviting. Stern did somewhat better in the lobby, which is paneled in English oak, with elaborately carved pilasters, fireplace mantels, and columns of brown Saracolin marble. It has a kind of 1930s elegance about it, not Art Deco but more like the kinds of places that were built in those days for people who considered Art Deco to be new and vulgar. Off the lobby are a library and a private dining room, with wine cellars in the basement, not to mention a 75-foot-long swimming pool. There is also a special waiting room for chauffeurs, and a private screening room.

Some of the tenants have already moved in, and the staff is trying to give the impression that it, like the limestone façades, is just like what you would find in the great old buildings. Some of them try a bit too hard. The other day, someone walked into



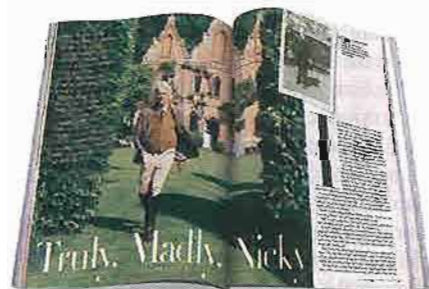
the lobby carrying a paper coffee cup from Starbucks, and the staff gave her disappearing looks, as if the building's high tone were so fragile that a paper coffee cup could shatter it. Many tenants are still decorating, and some of them, unwilling to take Stern's standard kitchens and bathrooms, have gutted their brand-new apartments and are reconstructing them to their own specifications. One owner I spoke with was less than thrilled when she discovered that the walls are made of plasterboard, which was most definitely not the way the walls were made at 740 Park Avenue, and that some of the light switches and electrical plates didn't line up as they should. There are limits, it appears, to how completely you can fake a 1920s building in the 21st century, and behind all that limestone, this is very much a new building.

She will take a year to rebuild her apartment, and then she and her husband will move in.

And some tenants may not move in at all. There have been a few resales of apartments by tenants who bought early, discovered that the Zeckendorfs' original high prices now seem low, and decided to take their profits. Sting is said to have been offered three times what he paid for his apartment, but he is staying. There is a giddiness to the market at 15 Central Park West that bears no resemblance to anything else going on now. One man flipped his never-occupied three-bedroom apartment for a \$7 million profit. This past spring, two penthouses that have never been occupied, one at the top of the House wing and the other high in the tower, were put on sale by owners at prices that are

higher than any New York apartments have ever traded for. The tower apartment, which originally cost \$21.9 million, can now be had for \$80 million. The other apartment, a four-bedroom duplex with a private elevator and terraces facing Central Park, does not have a fixed price. The owner has told brokers that it can be had by anyone who offers him more than \$90 million. And at the end of June, a real-estate broker was quoted as saying that another apartment was "quietly" on the market for \$150 million. No one knows, of course, whether the speculative frenzy at 15 Central Park West will hold. But since the building was created to support the fantasy of living in the 20s or 30s, it's no big deal to pretend also that it's 2005, when prices everywhere were still soaring. At 15 Central Park West, it's still 2005—unless, that is, it's really 1929. □

## Nicky Haslam



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 366 in an instant when at age seven he was suddenly struck with polio. He'd been riding ponies with his nanny at Cairngill estate, in Scotland, where his uncle lived, when the shock went through his body. "I remember feeling something extraordinary, like a thundercrack, going through me," Haslam recalls over dinner. "It was like I had an electric wire being plucked. And then I remember just feeling completely limp."

For three years, while other boys climbed trees and rode bikes, Haslam lay immobile within the same four walls of "Blue Room" in Hundridge Manor, in a cast from head to toe. He believed that this was how he would likely live out the rest of his life, and vacillated between panic and dumb acceptance. "It was almost like being a prisoner of war," Haslam says. "You just sort of make the day work. I mean, you just think about what you're going to have for supper, and what's going to be on the radio when you have your supper."

He didn't have friends his age to speak of. Instead, his world consisted of adults: visits from doctors and the servants, whom he loved, and, most important, the constant companionship of his mother, who handled the situation with stoic cheer and practicality, never letting her son believe for a moment that he had become a hardship. Diana brought her

friends into his room, along with the cocktail shaker and recordings of the latest American musicals: *Oklahoma!*, *Porgy and Bess*, *Annie Get Your Gun*. He couldn't join in, but he lay encased in plaster, entranced by the voice of Ethel Merman. Then, when he began to have some use of his hands and arms again, he spent the days redecorating a dollhouse. "[Getting polio] fueled his rich imagination," says his friend the antiques dealer Christopher Gibbs, who had been struck with polio as a child, too. "I'd like to think he sort of lay in bed enjoying fairy-tale palaces."

At age 10, Haslam, his body an atrophied white blob, was learning to walk again. Having been imprisoned for so long, he felt a racing desire to experience as much as he possibly could. "I wanted to be grown up the minute I could," says Haslam. He delighted in accompanying his mother to Millstream, the local dance club that attracted celebrities, or to a shop in Chesham that sold records, where he remembers longingly taking in the "teddy boys" insolently lounging about.

Homosexuality was a serious crime in the 50s. But, for Haslam, there was no "coming to terms" with being gay (though he has dabbled in affairs with women). "I've known [I was gay] since I was seduced by the heavenly tutor," says Haslam, who after two lessons was being gently kissed by the tall, long-haired, erudite young man hired to teach him. "It was the best moment of my life, really." Though the affair lasted several years and included sleepovers, the physical nature never went past kissing—which is perhaps why Haslam cherishes the memory so.

"The truth is I'm not that interested in sex," he says breezily. "I'm about love. It's wonderful once or something. The quickest way to fall out of love is to sleep with somebody. Don't shatter the crystal." Pure joy for Haslam is buying clothes for a love object.

By the time he entered Eton, Haslam already had a foot out the door, in search of glamour. At the very bottom of his class, with no particular drive to improve his standing, he spent his time sneaking away to see the latest Marilyn Monroe picture, and listening to show tunes at the local music shop. He wore a cologne called 4711 because he imagined it smelled of Paris. He brought his visual flair to his dorm room, decorating it with fake-ostrich-plume pelmets, and fake grass as a carpet. Personally, he cut a dashing figure. Jane Ormsby-Gore, a friend from that era, recalls, "I remember his arriving at the Eton-Harrow match on the back of his sort of pink scooter or green scooter. And I thought, This is the most glamorous thing that's ever been."

There was more to be seen. At the age of 15, Haslam accompanied his mother to New York to visit her daughter, Anne, from a previous marriage, who was by then grown and married to John Loeb, the Brillo heir. There he met a young acting student, Raymond, who invited Haslam to go to the country to see "a friend"—who turned out to be Tallulah Bankhead. "Tallulah took off her dark glasses; the green eyes narrowed... 'Daaaahling!'" Haslam recalls. Ray also offered him his body—and Haslam was done for. He sobbed on the sail back to England, prompting his mother to say, "Do pull yourself together. He's only a boy." Haslam's love letters went unreturned. "I felt the first tremors of heartbreak," he recalls.

Fabulous gay strangers continued to find Haslam irresistible. A year later, he was approached on the street by a tall figure in thigh-high leather boots and loud, checked trousers. His name was Simon Fleet and he was a famous homosexual of the demimonde. With boundless enthusiasm for art, beauty, people, and remaking himself (he'd had significant plastic surgery and, once upon