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BUILT FOR THE AGES

By Roger Grody





For some discerning buyers, a building constructed a century ago demands greater consideration than the latest supertall, contemporary tower.

Offsetting the trend of luxury home buyers gravitating to glistening, newly-built towers is the enduring attraction of pre-war buildings with old-world craftsmanship, high ceilings, and lobbies emitting timeless elegance. Through meticulous restoration and updates, structures built between the Gilded Age and World War II reveal their true luster.

Developers are converting historic office or hotel buildings into luxury condominium projects, with world-class interior designers elevating original architectural elements. Stately pre-war structures overlook Central Park in Manhattan, but such buildings command premiums across the country. The craftsmanship that draws luxury buyers to these properties also distinguishes the era's single-family residences.

In New York, few pre-war structures carry as much cachet value as The Astor, built in 1901 by hotelier William Waldorf Astor. Ryan Harter, Principal of CIM Group—the company that undertook the building's recent reimagining with interior design firm Pembroke & Ives—reported, "Pre-war buildings like The Astor captivate luxury buyers with their timeless architectural details and inimitable charm." Citing the venerable building's carefully restored marble-wrapped wood-burning fireplaces and grand lobby showcasing vintage elegance, he added, "Combining these one-of-a-kind features with contemporary upgrades creates the perfect experience for modern buyers." One of three spectacular penthouses, featuring modern architecture that discreetly crowns the turn-of-the-century structure, is currently offered at \$13.95 million.

720 West End Avenue, a classic 17-story Renaissance Revival-style building originally designed as a hotel, is being transformed into 131 luxury residences (available spring 2025), including a penthouse with sweeping Hudson River views priced at \$11.6 million. "The thoughtful revival of Emery Roth's 1927 design with contemporary interiors by Thomas Juul-Hansen creates a seamless integration of historical

grandeur with modern design innovation," said Myles Horn, Managing Partner of Glacier Equities. Insisting it represents a rare find in today's market, Horn said of prospective buyers, "While they come from diverse backgrounds, they share an appreciation for elegant design, architectural legacy, and an amenity-rich lifestyle afforded by a prestigious address."

Claire Staszak, Principal Designer and Owner of Chicago-based Centered by Design—the firm's portfolio includes both pre-war condominiums and single-family homes—reported robust demand for vintage residences. "It's not a matter of multi-family or single-family, but a decision by buyers to embrace historic properties," said Staszak of her clients' motivations. "Pre-war buildings are appealing to many buyers because they provide more of a single-family lifestyle but with a doorman, less upkeep, and, in the case of Chicago, a view of the lake," she said.

Characterizing her firm's approach to updating pre-war interiors, Staszak stated, "We try to preserve and showcase historic elements but present them in a modern, fresh way." The designer observes, "Our single-family clients tend to be young families who really appreciate architecture and a sense of history." Staszak explained, "They're willing to restore these properties because they can't be recreated at the same price point."

Restoration of large multistory residential buildings is not as prevalent in San Francisco as New York or Chicago, submitted Peter Chovanes, Associate Broker and Luxury Collection Specialist at Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Drysdale Properties. But the veteran San Francisco agent sees sustained interest in the revitalization of the charming single-family homes or townhouses that define the city. "Buyers of old Victorian or Edwardian homes like the traditional exteriors—they really appreciate the properties' detailed woodwork—but tend to strip down the interiors to be modern and tech-worthy," said Chovanes. "The current trend is to paint the exteriors in more neutral tones, rather than the 'Painted Ladies' look," he said, referring to the vibrantly-colored Victorian townhouses long considered a quintessential San Francisco aesthetic. When these old homes are restored, maxing out the allowable square footage and elevating interiors, they appeal to well-heeled technology executives, reported Chovanes.

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***Claire Staszak,
Owner, Centered by Design***

Main:
The Astor at 235 West 75th Street, built in 1901.

Bottom Left:
Interior design by Claire Staszak.

Top Right:
Portrait of Claire Staszak.

Photo courtesy of Binyan Studios (main); courtesy of Heather Talbert (bottom left); courtesy of Amandine & Jules (top right).



Anybody with a sweet tooth will appreciate Bahamian cuisine, and innovative local chefs are elevating the islands' traditional desserts for international visitors.

The Bahamas is renowned for its beaches—mesmerizing turquoise waters lapping against sugar-white sand—as well as an elite yachting culture, a collection of luxury resort hotels, and casino action. This idyllic galaxy of islands in the Caribbean also has a rich culinary heritage, and while the nation's abundant seafood takes center stage, desserts are also a local passion. Now, Bahamian chefs are reimagining some of the nation's traditional sweet treats.

The cuisine of the Bahamas is a product of diverse influences: West Africans, colonists from Spain and Britain, and even migrants from the American South. Fresh seafood—particularly conch, grouper, and spiny lobster—dominates menus, but items such as bread pudding, coconut tarts, benny cake (sesame seed brittle), and the iconic “duff” grab attention for desserts. Celebrity Bahamian chef, food writer, and Emmy Award-winning television producer Simeon Hall Jr. reported, “Bahamian desserts are typically a unique combination of two or more seasonal fruits, baked and steamed doughs, chilled butter sauces, and rum.” He also shared that sweets are constantly evolving, thanks to the imagination of local chefs willing to break with tradition. “Bimini, known as the ‘baking island,’ highlights our love for bread and ‘dough-like’ treats such as duff,” said Hall.

The duff—usually composed of guava, though other seasonal fruits can be incorporated—has been called the “national dessert” of the Bahamas. Historians suggest duff was derived from a Scottish dish called cloutie dumpling, and that Bahamian cooks added rum or brandy to sweeten it. Typically, pastry dough is rolled with guava paste, seasoned with cinnamon or other spices, then steamed and served with a rum sauce. Hall stated, “Duff is the quintessential Bahamian dessert, beloved for its rich and indulgent flavor by locals and tourists alike.” He explained that contemporary chefs are deviating from duff's

traditional shape and cooking technique, with innovative interpretations that even include Asian-inspired bao bun versions. “It has also been reinterpreted with savory twists, such as crab duff and short rib duff with demi-glace butter,” said Hall. “Other local desserts that chefs love to reimagine are coconut tarts and cakes,” explained the chef, who offers a coconut tart granola at his Brews & Brunch pop-up restaurant, plated with whipped coconut yogurt and coconut-macerated seasonal fruit.

Cynthra Smith-Ariscar, Executive Pastry Chef at the iconic Atlantis Paradise Island Resort, advised, “My desserts are designed to not only tantalize the eyes, but take guests on an adventure through their palates.” Balancing tradition with innovation, the native Bahamian chef tweaks the classic duff by incorporating fresh coconut into guava compote, then folding it into a dough, cutting it into slices, and steam-baking. “I pair it with a smooth, creamy, guava-infused cheesecake and vanilla bean Chantilly cream,” she added.

Making over the traditional Bahamian rum cake, Smith-Ariscar uses fresh pineapples and lime zest to heighten the flavor of the batter, which she bakes in Bundt-shaped molds, then soaks with coconut-rum syrup. “The contrast of flavors and textures creates complexity, and tastes fantastic,” she said. “As pastry chefs, we must continue to develop new and exciting concepts while adhering to timeless old favorites,” maintained Smith-Ariscar.

Traditional Bahamian desserts are not typically showcased at The Ocean Club, a glamorous Four Seasons resort whose signature restaurant is a project of Michelin-starred chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten. But The Ocean Club Executive Pastry Chef Phil Warden sometimes prepares a coconut tart that combines local ingredients with sophisticated European techniques, exquisitely plated with pineapple-mint compote, pineapple sorbet, and a fresh mint tuille.

“If I was to serve bread pudding, I'd probably switch out the bread for croissant or panettone, but load it with local spices,” said Warden, who suggested serving it with a Bahamian John Watling's rum crème anglaise and coconut johnny cake croutons for a little crunch.

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*Cynthra Smith-Ariscar,
Executive Pastry Chef
at the Atlantis Paradise
Island Resort*

Left:
Dessert at The Ocean Club.

Above:
Gorgeous sunset at the
Atlantis Paradise Island.

Photo courtesy of The Ocean Club (left); courtesy of Atlantis Paradise Island Resort (above).