

August 14, 2023 06:03 AM | 5 HOURS AGO

Decades-old Murray Hill 'sliver' building with Hollywood ties lists its final units

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A 1980s Murray Hill tower with Hollywood ties—and a key role in zoning history—is embracing a third act.

Morgan Court, a 40-unit condo known as a sliver building for its unusually skinny proportions (and that was appropriately the setting for the 1993 Sharon Stone thriller "Sliver"), has begun to market its final three sponsor units.

The sale of duplexes Nos. 26B, 28B and 28A at 211 Madison Ave. will in a way mark the end of a four-decade-long real estate tale. But don't expect the condo's sponsor, Mark Perl binder, a development veteran whose father built two large apartment houses on the block, to wax sentimental.

"It's bricks and mortar. There's no emotion," Perl binder said. "You can't have a discussion with a building like you can with flesh and blood.

The former site of a carriage house for financier neighbor J.P. Morgan and his offspring, Morgan Court was conceived in the mid-1980s amid a backlash to controversial sliver buildings, which are often several times taller than the structures around them. On one side of the 32-story Morgan Court is a church parish house 209 Madison with five stories; an apartment building at 22 E. 36th St. has 10.

The city eventually passed an anti-sliver zoning law to limit the height of structures on lots narrower than 45 feet. But Perl binder avoided the crackdown by breaking ground in March 1983 one day before the new law took effect.

Brushes with silver-screen fame came later. "Sliver," in which the building (addressed as 113 E. 38th St.) has challenges with a tenant video-surveillance system and frequent murders, was followed by "Law & Order," which filmed scenes in the building, Perl binder said. The 2010s-era "Selling New York" broker-focused reality show also used Morgan Court as a set, said Reba Miller, the Compass agent handling sales there today.

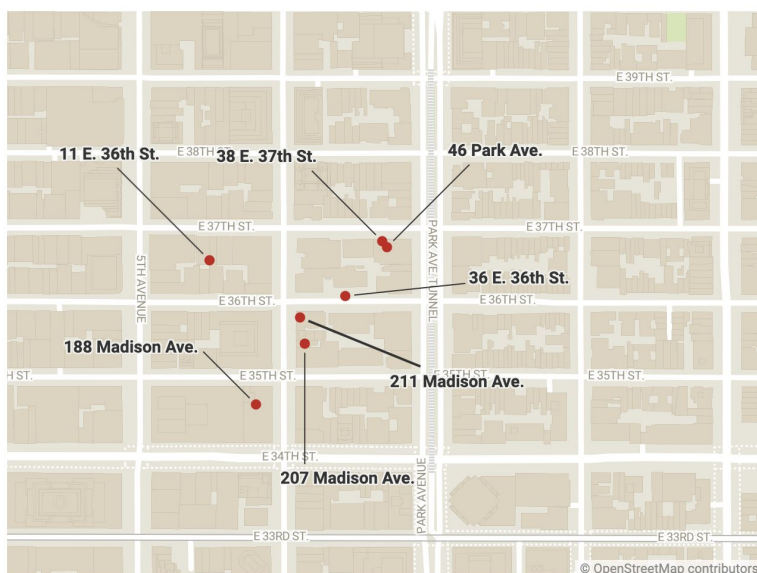
Apartment designs have evolved along the way. The first batch of six units, which managed to find takers just before the late-1980s recession hit, featured greenish Formica and teak floors, Miller said. An effort to reboot the building in the mid-2000s and sell its 22 remaining sponsor units, many of which were functioning as rentals (though some were often kept empty), added marble counters and stainless steel appliances.

For the third push, the trio of remaining developer units, all of them three-bedroom duplexes, have relocated their kitchens for better flow while also adding numerous floor-to-ceiling windows that boost the amount of views by 25%. At a time of slowed condo sales, Morgan Court is asking \$3.6 million for No. 28A, \$3.3 million for No. 26B and \$3.4 million for No. 28B.

"Developers today are on a different trajectory. Construction loans are written so people are always breathing down their necks. But if developers could hang on to units, they should," said Miller, who has marketed development projects for decades. "Value appreciates with time."

Who Owns the Block

Hover over each dot to learn about properties in Manhattan's Murray Hill neighborhood.



211 Madison Ave.

A 1980s sliver-style condo that's marketing its last sponsor units four decades after sales started, No. 211 offers its residents a spacious courtyard shared with other buildings on its block. All the sites have overlapping ownership courtesy of the deep-rooted Perl binder family, which has developed several buildings in Murray Hill and is in its fourth generation of leadership. Patriarch Joseph Perl binder built housing in Brooklyn and the Bronx. His son Julius Perl binder developed postwar apartment complexes like 35 E. 35th St. and 36 E. 36th St. plus the Schwab House at 11 Riverside Drive, a co-op today. His son Mark Perl binder built No. 211; a daughter, Muffy Flouret, is also in the family business. When actress Sharon Stone was filming in the building for the movie "Sliver," she was in the courtyard and ran into Mark, whom she said she recognized from somewhere. As it turned out, both Perl binder and Stone were regulars at the department store Bergdorf Goodman, Perl binder said.

6 E. 36th St.

This 12-story red brick postwar rental building, which city records say has 108 units, was developed by Julius Perl binder, Mark Perl binder's father, although deeds indicate that members of the Berger and West families also owned stakes at various times. A studio apartment in early August with parquet floors and stainless steel appliances was listed at \$3,700 a month. J.P. Morgan Jr., known as Jack, a son of the Gilded Age financier of the same name, once owned the property after buying it in 1929 from the Williams family through his Flintlock Realty Co. using a \$100,000 mortgage with a 5% interest rate, according to The New York Times. Jack lived at 231 Madison, an 1854 brownstone with 22 fireplaces that today mostly contains offices for the Morgan Library and Museum around the corner. Dad J.P. Morgan Sr. lived in a similar building on the same block, at 219 Madison Ave., which was razed in 1928 to make way for the library's annex.

38 E. 37th St.

A vestige of an era when Murray Hill was synonymous with aristocracy, this site offers the Union League Club, a membership-only organization that dates back to 1863. Formed during the Civil War to preserve the Union and limiting its membership then to Republicans at a time when the party was associated with the Northern states, the Union League Club relaxed its rules during President Franklin Roosevelt's second term in 1937 to allow in Democrats, too, according to a city report to confer landmark status on the 12-story, 99,000-square-foot brick structure. In 1931, the Union League Club moved to the site, its fourth home, from Fifth Avenue and East 39th Street in a deal orchestrated by non-member J.P. Morgan Jr., who assembled several parcels and apparently sold them to the club at cost. Fifteen U.S. presidents, including Teddy Roosevelt, have apparently been members of the club, which requires men to wear jackets until 4 p.m. on Fridays.

207 Madison Ave.

The 13,000-square-foot neo-Gothic structure here, the Episcopalian Church of the Incantation, opened in 1864 and is a city and National Register landmark known for its stained-glass windows, several of which were created by Tiffany designers. A major fire in 1882 wiped out the organ and a west-facing window, although the church appears to have quickly rebuilt them. The Delanos (as in Franklin Delano Roosevelt) and the Morgans were parishioners in the early 20th century. When Sara Roosevelt, Franklin's mother, died in 1941, the church built special access ramps to allow her wheelchair-using son, who was then the president, to enter. A parish house completes the picture at next door No. 209.

46 Park Ave.

Though headquartered in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, the arts-friendly Pratt Institute has had four Manhattan outposts since its founding in 1887. The first was in this five-story townhouse, which Pratt purchased in 1968. A gallery mainly used for showcasing works by Pratt students, 46 Park claims to have hosted 57 shows between 1970 and 1974. In 1978, after relocating to a larger space at nearby 160 Lexington Ave., Pratt sold the 7,800-square-foot building to the Republic of El Salvador for use as its Permanent Mission to the United Nations, which allowed the diplomatic organization to relocate from East 43rd Street. The sale price was about \$100,000, or \$500,000 today, according to city records. (Pratt's current Manhattan location is on West 14th Street.) Wedged between two bulkier towers, No. 46 provides a feel for Murray Hill's scale in its Beaux-Arts heyday before high-rises shouldered in.

188 Madison Ave.

This massive full-block structure with arched ground-floor windows was for decades a prominent department store in the B. Altman and Co. chain. After shuttering in 1988, it sat empty for several years before Morton Olshan and Peter Malkin redeveloped the cavernous 13-story, 885,000-square-foot prewar structure into a half-dozen commercial condos. Oxford University Press, which uses the address 198 Madison, owns a five-story berth. Another was occupied by a branch of the New York Public Library dedicated to science, industry and business from 1996 until 2016 when it decamped to the revamped Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library across from the main branch on Fifth Avenue. Since 1999, the City University of New York has offered graduate level classes in another space that's reachable from the Fifth Avenue facade.

11 E. 36th St.

In the mid-2000s, developer Eli Bobker redeveloped this 1912 terracotta office building into a condo, Morgan Lofts, which initially hit the market with 57 studios to two-bedrooms. But the project apparently had trouble selling through the Great Recession, and in 2014, with 14 apartments left to go, Bobker faced bankruptcy before the lender Madison Realty Capital swooped in with a \$19 million loan. Madison founder Josh Zegen is listed in state records as a principal of Morgan Lofts ownership today. A two-bedroom resale last listed at \$1.4 million went into contract in May after being marketed for a year. The Ginger Man, a craft beer-focused bar named for an American character in a J.P. Donleavy novel who carouses around Ireland, opened in 1996 in the building's 4,000-square-foot ground-floor space but became a 2021 casualty of the pandemic.