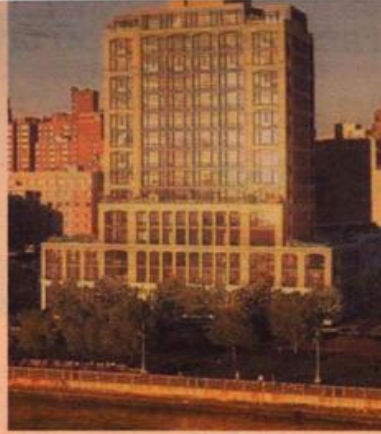


March 24, 2010



The Up-and-Comer

The Superior Ink condo boasts Swank, Jacobs and Nascar champ Johnson—and that's just the first wave

BY CHLOE MALLE

The elevator at the Superior Ink building was gently lit and cleanly coffered on all three sides. This past Sunday, Eric Zollinger, a senior sales associate for Related Companies, the condo tower's developer, was crisply suited and freshly showered with gelled hair that stood at attention like fresh-mowed grass. He used the elevator ride to hammer home the benefits of the building to his audience, an all-black-clad blonde in her late 30s looking to buy.

The prospective buyer hovered almost a foot above Mr. Zollinger's alert follicles. Her natural height combined with 5-inch studded black wedges and high-end leggings made her a formidable elevator companion. The salesman was undeterred.

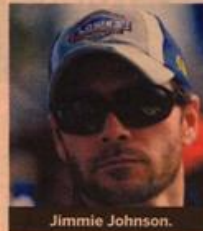
"God, I don't know why I have no voice today!" he said, a hoarse cusp creeping in at the end of his sentences. "I just woke up and it was gone! And I love to talk."

"Oh, come on, you had too much fun last night," the buyer purred with a rasp more pronounced than Mr. Zollinger's; unlike him, she did not apologize.

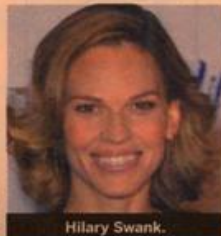
"I wish! No, my friend and I just drank some Champagne and watched movies. He likes to come over because he lives in midtown"—midtown, pronounced with heavy horror, could easily have been replaced with "the gulag" and no change in tone would have been necessary—"and, you know, everyone wants to be downtown now, it's cool and hip. That's why people just love Superior Ink so much." A true Willy Loman, no anecdote unfurled without a sales pitch woven neatly in the telling.

But Mr. Zollinger is right. People do seem to love Superior Ink (one broker compared it to 15 Central Park West, the most expensive condo, sales-wise, in New York history).

Of the 68 original units in the 17-story tower, only five are still available. Owners include Oscar favorite Hilary Swank; designer Marc Jacobs, who bought one of the townhouses for over \$10 million; Nascar champ Jimmie Johnson; South African Internet billionaire Mark Shuttleworth; Showtime CEO Matthew Blank; Broadway theater owner Jordan Roth; Houston Rock-



Jimmie Johnson.



Hilary Swank.

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Superior Ink Steps Up

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ets owner Leslie Alexander, who bought the penthouse for \$25 million last September and one week later re-listed it for \$39.5 million; and real estate super-broker Doug Harmon.

The Related Companies, led by Miami Dolphins owner Stephen Ross and famed for its co-development of the Time Warner Center, bought the former Superior Ink factory, a discreet warehouse quietly hugging the highway on the corner of Bethune Street at the edge of the West Village, for \$41 million in the fall of 2006 (remember, the penthouse alone is currently listed at \$39.5 million). Much to the chagrin of nostalgic locals, it was leveled, and out of its Old New York ashes rose a historically conscious condo colossus designed by architect Robert A.M. Stern.

Mr. Stern, who has established himself as master of the prewar

parody building, comes off the campaign-like success of 15 Central Park West—also his design. “It’s not a shrinking violet and it’s not a Me-Too building,” Mr. Stern said Tuesday of Superior Ink.

The row of seven townhouses line Bethune Street and are connected to the tower and on-site parking garage, providing the amenities and security of condo living with the suburban benefits of a townhouse. The townhouse facades smile gayly with bay windows and curling metalwork railings, like an elegant Disneyland offshoot—SuperiorLand! Related paired Mr. Stern with Yabu Pushelberg, who designed the starkly modern interiors.

On Sunday afternoon, the tower seemed empty and very much still under construction. Workmen and movers milled through the halls, almost all of whose floors remain bare, awaiting the arrival of the carpets, hand-tufted in Nepal. The only residential activity was a young woman

riding the elevator with her wide-eyed maltese. But Susan de Franca, Related’s sales director, assured *The Observer*: “Over half of our buyers have moved in; construction ended three months ago. It’s just that many of our buyers have weekend homes, so Sunday is quiet.”

The mezzanine level hosts the common rooms, which include a brightly colored children’s playroom equipped with a petite table and chairs, a canister of markers doughnuted in a deftly designed crevice in the middle of the table; the room is conveniently connected to the Equinox-outfitted fitness center and Pilates room (Related owns Equinox). Next door, in the intimate screening room, L-shaped couches hug the corners like lichen, and two centered metallic leather armchairs emit the sheen and shade of film canisters. In the entertainment lounge, symmetrical built-in bookshelves frame a series of Rorschach-like butterfly prints

against the back wall boasting Assouline publishing titles, including *Panama: A Legendary Hat*, three copies of Ricky Lauren’s *Cuisine, Lifestyle and the Legend of the Double RL Ranch and Hitchcock Style*.

Asked to see a waterfront-view condo still on the market, Mr. Zollinger, the salesman, smiles knowingly. “I have the perfect one for you to see—it’s 3,234 square feet.” Eight-C is the last great apartment available in the building, four bedrooms with a den, which, Mr. Zollinger is quick to point out, could double as a fifth bedroom. Mr. Pushelberg’s interior design is certainly stark, with dark gray cabinetry patterned with strange striations and a Brancusi-inspired bathtub that seems better suited for a slick hotel. Walls of windows provide an unobstructed view of New Jersey. “At night the lights of the Jersey Sho—uh, City—are incredible!”

“You know I actually think I sold that apartment last night,” Ms. de Franca told *The Observer* over the phone from Aspen. “Yes, here in Aspen, I’m serious! I’m actually vacationing with two building owners who are already in occupancy. I didn’t even have to sell it—they sold it for me! By the end of dinner, their friend was asking me, ‘Do you have any left?’ And I told him, ‘Actually, we have one great unit left!’”

Aside from the celebrities, who is ballasting Superior Ink as the new It building? “You can’t pinpoint one kind of buyer. They’re really all people at the top of their industries,” Ms. de Franca said. “We have people from the entertainment business—a lot of people from the entertainment business, actually—the real estate, sports, activists—”

Activists? “Well, I mean people who are active and athletically inclined because you’re right next to the Hudson park and bike path.”

cmalle@observer.com