



# LIFE AT THE TOP

NEW YORK'S MOST EXCEPTIONAL  
APARTMENT BUILDINGS

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHEL ARNAUD



## ◊ 778 ◊ PARK AVENUE

778 PARK AVENUE FOLLOWED DIRECTLY ON THE HEELS OF 740 PARK AVENUE; Candela likely filed plans for the two buildings simultaneously. In May 1929, Charles Newmark, president of the Kentucky Holding Corp., announced an eighteen-story apartment on the northwest corner of 73rd Street, then known as 780 Park Avenue, just days apart from the announcement of its Candela-designed neighbor to the south, 770 Park, developed by Edgar A. Levy. Replacing the five-story Sunnyside apartment house (1889), the building—like 720 and 740 Park—represented the best of Candela's work as he continued his northern march up the avenue, transforming the thoroughfare with his distinctive brand of luxury architecture. Construction of a sophisticated neo-Georgian red brick edifice with robust limestone details and quoining ensued. It, too, rose squarely to the twelfth floor before bursting upward in an asymmetrical assemblage of setbacks, terraces, and bays. A rooftop temple masking a prosaic water tower was erected at the center, ornately festooned with limestone urns, arched openings, and Ionic columns. George Chappell, or "T-Square," the architectural critic for *The New Yorker*, opined that although the design had "more repose in the arrangement, less in detail" than 770 Park going up next door, "there [was] a distressing amount of half-baked architecture in New York, an architecture which seem[ed] to proclaim loudly a lack of the training necessary for fine work."<sup>1</sup> Floor plans advertised the expansive full-floor apartments with an average of sixteen rooms, a wide, thirty-six-foot-long gallery opening into an east-facing living room, and six bedrooms. With a 1930 occupancy date, R. Livingston Beeckman—the former governor of Rhode Island—purchased the duplex *maisonette* just as the site's excavation work was getting underway.

Although there were some early co-op sales by mid-1929, construction on the building all but stopped by July 1930, as the repercussions of the Depression began to be felt and the building frenzy of the past decade screeched to a halt. Suddenly, New Yorkers were no longer vying for such large apartments, and developers, competing with a number of equivalent buildings on the market, began to lose their shirts. By early 1931, with the interiors yet to be carried out, Newmark was forced to hand over the unfinished building

OPPOSITE The gold Venetian plaster of the arched passageway between the living room and the dining room is in striking contrast to the dining room's blue-lacquered walls.



## PARK AVENUE PENTHOUSE

This rooftop duplex, while not the largest apartment in the building, is its most unique. With multiple terraces and a freestanding teahouse, it feels like a private house in the sky, surrounded by lush, multi-tiered gardens. The lower floor, consisting of a large living room, blue-lacquered octagonal dining room, and library, connects by a sinuous stair decorated with a mural depicting the Dance of the Seven Veils, original to the apartment, to a master suite with yet another terrace. After acquiring the apartment in 2008, its owners embarked on a two-year renovation, working with Australian architect Stephen Wang and interior designer Charles Pavarini to revive the classic space. A blend of traditional and contemporary elements, the rooms exhibit all the drama and flair for which Pavarini has become known. His theatrical lighting emphasizes the apartment's bold architectural details, lush fabrics, reflective surfaces, and furnishings—a mix of new, custom-made pieces and vintage pieces from the likes of Maison Jansen and Jean-Michel Frank. On the terraces, landscape designer Maureen Hackett introduced trees, shrubs, perennials, and seasonal flowers, creating a rooftop oasis that steps up and down around the apartment's different levels. The interior of the teahouse—a charming garden folly—evokes the ambience of Morocco with its green- and blue-tiled walls and exotic lanterns.

OPPOSITE Floor plan. Brooke Astor's apartment on the sixteenth floor was connected to a bedroom suite on the floor below.

ABOVE In the teahouse, the blue and green hand-thrown tiles, lit by great arched windows on all sides by day and lanterns by night, lend the space an exotic flair. The room is furnished with a mix of family heirlooms and flea market finds.

OVERLEAF The teahouse—the urban incarnation of a Palladian garden folly—is the pièce de résistance of the apartment. The western terrace, landscaped by Maureen Hackett, offers unrivaled views of the cityscape and Central Park.





LEFT The original owner of the apartment installed a mural depicting the Dance of the Seven Veils, ca. 1896, on the wall of the elegant curved stair.

BELOW A small bar is inset between the foyer and library.



RIGHT Four Ming dynasty tomb attendants decorate one of the shelves in the library.

BELOW The library features an original wrought-iron stair railing by Edgar Brandt, a well-known French ironworker. Interior designer Charles Pavarini covered the walls and the chairs, which he accented with bronze nailheads, in a beige Ultrasuede by Kravet.

OVERLEAF A large steel-gray velvet sofa that Pavarini designed anchors the living room, the dominant palette of which is gold and beige—from the plaster ceiling and pierced crown cove to the drapery fabric by Rubelli and the valances in a Larsen fabric, which were embroidered by Penn & Fletcher with semiprecious stones to match. An antique Maison Jansen cabinet that belonged to the owner's mother stands against the wall on the left.







TOP The color of the original stone mantel in the living room is echoed in the gold and beige palette of the décor.



ABOVE LEFT A glass-topped side table is by Lorin Marsh.



ABOVE RIGHT Pavarini customized the black leather head chairs in the dining room with dragonflies and other insects, which were embroidered by Penn & Fletcher using some of the owner's gemstones and hemp thread.



OPPOSITE A Gustavian wood chair with gilt ornamentation sits in front of a Coromandel screen.

