

REAL ESTATE

Affluents drawn to branded residences' trusted names: Hilton exec

May 10, 2021



Interior of a residence at The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria. Image credit: Waldorf Astoria

By KATIE TAMOLA

With luxury accommodations behind a recognizable name, many consumers are finding both comfort and investment opportunities through branded residences.

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**
Plus: Just released
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

For many affluents, specifically those unfamiliar with a certain area, branded residences offer an extra level of appeal. Last March, for the first time in history, consumers were invited to buy a home at The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria in New York City, which has since received nearly 7,000 inquiries from consumers around the globe.

"One key reason why this is a good move for buyers is that people feel reassured in having a trusted and recognized name behind their living accommodations, especially those known for superior levels of hospitality and service," said Dino Michael, senior vice president and global category head of luxury brands at **Hilton**. "People gravitate to brands they know and trust and the Waldorf Astoria is one of the most trusted luxury brands worldwide."

In this Q&A, Mr. Michael discusses the appeal of **The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria**, trends accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the appeal as well as flexibility of branded residences. Here is the dialogue:



Dino Michael, senior vice president and global category head of luxury brands at Hilton. Image courtesy of Hilton

Why is now the perfect time to buy a branded residence? Can you share some of the reasons why this would be a good move for a buyer?

There's never been a better time to purchase a branded residence, especially in today's thriving real estate market, and we are seeing an increasing amount of interest in this style of living. At The Towers residences in New York City, we have the ultimate name recognition as the original flagship of the Waldorf Astoria brand, located on Park Avenue and offering a very rich history, both architecturally and culturally, which has certainly drawn buyers since we launched sales.

Branded residences' international popularity has been fueled by an ever-growing group of ultra-mobile global elite and their demand for flexible, 24/7 hotel-style living. Looking at this from an international viewpoint, branded residences make the perfect investment choice for unfamiliar and non-native residents, giving clients the opportunity to buy into a home with a globally recognized, reputable brand that they can trust.

The pandemic has also changed people's perspectives on leisure travel, and with the ability for many buyers to now work from home, buyers are looking for a true "live, work, and play" aspect within their primary residence. People are staying in their vacation homes much longer, so the concept of owning a primary home and vacation getaway has integrated, and for many, living within a branded residence ticks all the boxes.

The sheer scale of lifestyle offerings, services and amenities offered at The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria as well as other Waldorf Astoria residences, provide residents with an experience that no other residential buildings can match.

Lastly, branded residences offer residents all of the benefits of living within a hotel but in a permanent home setting. You can have all of the amenities in the world, but nothing beats incredible personalized and detailed service from residential or hotel staff, and Waldorf Astoria New York set the standard and defined hotel service at an ultra-luxury level.

Many of our buyers also have a personal connection to the Waldorf Astoria, and that always wins out in the choice between a "vacation home" versus living within an iconic building such as The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria.

The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria in New York City, have seen nearly 7,000 inquiries from all corners of the world after launching sales, and even had a buyer from Australia purchase sight-unseen during the pandemic. Did you see this often during the COVID-19 pandemic buyers seizing opportunities sight-unseen?

When nearly 7,000 people have inquired about residences at The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria, you know the brand is resonating globally. Anticipating inquiries from all over the world, our sales team developed the appropriate digital sales tools to cater to our international customers, such as virtual tours that would provide a comprehensive overview to a buyer who would not be able to visit the sales gallery in person.

Last year, the sales team was contacted directly by an interested buyer living in Australia who had fond memories of his stays at Waldorf Astoria New York. They were able to show him the development and identify a residence for him completely virtually.

He signed a contract to purchase a residence in mid-March.

Since the new year, the sales team at The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria has seen substantially increased market interest and viewings at the property. In one case, a buyer who was looking at residences well above \$5 million made a purchase sight unseen.

When they did come to visit the development in person, they were so impressed with the building that they decided to purchase a second residence in the same price range. Another buyer, who came to the residential sales gallery on Park Avenue, was so excited about a specific unit, that upon hearing that another prospective buyer had just toured the same residence, signed a contract immediately at the full asking price, a little more than \$3 million, in order to secure their dream home.

We continue to see an inherent passion for the Waldorf Astoria brand, and buying a residence sight-unseen from across the world is evidence that buyers are willing to commit to something special.

Are there any other trends you have noticed recently/during the pandemic in regards to branded residences?

The pandemic hasn't necessarily created new trends for branded residences, it's only accelerated things that were

already in motion. The whole notion of the blurring of business and leisure travel has been around for a while and our hotels and branded residences have reacted to that.

Luckily, we were prescient in this regard, and The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria will offer access to The Empire Club, New York's most opulent work-from-home amenity, which will include a co-working lounge, private fully equipped offices, reception facilities, a board room, and meeting rooms.

Wellness is another trend that was highly developed pre-COVID and will only grow to encompass more elements of hospitality and branded residents. Residents at The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria will have the best of both worlds: an entirely private fitness center with a 25-meter pool, private training studios, steam, sauna, and treatment rooms in addition to preferred access to the hotel spa with market-leading wellness, beauty, and nutrition regimens.

Waldorf Astoria New York is a couple years from opening, so we have the luxury of taking a wait-and-see approach within this sector.

For affluents looking to buy, what would you tell them sets a branded residence experience apart from other luxury routes? Why is a branded residence the best route?

Branded residences offer residents the flexibility to enjoy a pied-a-terre lifestyle with all of the benefits of living within a hotel. For The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria specifically, it is the ultimate long-term investment The Towers will offer the first opportunity in history to own a home in the iconic building, living within the same walls as some of the world's most iconic celebrities, every United States president from Hoover to Obama, and international royalty and heads of state.

In addition, while regular luxury vacation homes can be an option for buyers wanting to own a second home in a beautiful location, you're still caught up with typical responsibilities of homeownership that make it feel far from a vacation when you factor in maintenance and upkeep. Aside from the fact that many of our buyers have a personal connection to the hotel, they also are looking to buy into the quality, security and high levels of service which are synonymous with upscale luxury brands like the Waldorf Astoria.

Those who purchase at The Towers are looking for more than just a hotel room; they want the best of both worlds.

Can you please tell me more about the new residences at the Waldorf Astoria flagship and namesake, the iconic Waldorf Astoria New York on Park Avenue? What are some of the offerings/aspects you are most excited about?

There are so many things I'm excited about with the new residences at The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria. We're offering an exceptional amenities suite that is far and above anything else offered in New York City residential development.

With 50,000 square feet of private residential amenities, including the 25-meter skylit Starlight Pool, residents will have access to unprecedented space for fitness and wellness, and entertaining space. Another unique service only available at The Towers, is that every residence will have its own concierge closet seamlessly integrated into the entryway.

It is the ultimate social distancing amenity and will allow secure and private delivery of packages, laundry, room service, etc. from a dedicated team of porters 24/7.

On a more personal level, having had the opportunity to watch the transformation and impeccable restoration of this hotel has made me appreciate the living and breathing history that this building represents. Having the opportunity to be a part of that continued history- either as a hotel guest or resident- is a truly special thing.