

Fabled Waldorf Astoria's new private flats in New York drawing interest from Hong Kong, mainland China buyers

Studios start at US\$1.7 million at the residential tower project at the New York landmark

History of hotel includes ownership by Anbang Insurance before the fall of high-flying founder Wu Xiaohui

By Cheryl Arcibal

Impressions: 41,500,000



The historic luxury hotel Waldorf Astoria New York has formally started the sale of its luxury condominium residences called The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria. Photo: Xinhua

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The fabled Waldorf Astoria of New York, which once got caught up in the saga of riches-to-rags Anbang Insurance Group, is attracting Chinese money again. This time, for flats in its new residential tower.

“We have received a significant number of enquiries from around the world, including many from Hong Kong and mainland China,” said Mei Wong, executive director and head of international residential sales, Knight Frank Hong Kong.

The sale of the 375 luxury condominium units of The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria began last week, Wong said, declining to say how many have been sold so far. Two thirds of the flats are two bedrooms or smaller. Listed prices begin at US\$1.7 million for a 526 sq ft studio.



Guests visit a show suite of The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria during a tour on March 3. Photo: Xinhua

Amenities include a 25 metre pool, four private bars, spas and a wine tasting room. The Park Avenue property, which was featured in Hollywood films such as The Royal Tenenbaums and Serendipity, was redeveloped by Chinese company Dajia Insurance Group, the successor to troubled Anbang.

The residential launch comes amid the spreading Covid-19 disease, which has tempered the appetite of buyers for real estate given disruptions in air travel and the overall slowdown in the global economy.

The Waldorf Astoria made international headlines in 2014 when Wu Xiaohui, Anbang’s billionaire founder, bought the trophy for nearly US\$2 billion. The deal came at a time

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when HNA, Dalian Wanda and other high-flying Chinese groups were embarking on buying sprees around the world.

Beijing would call an end to that, seizing Anbang in February 2018 and arresting Wu, who pleaded guilty to fraud and embezzlement and was sentenced to 18 years in jail. The government created Dajia Insurance to hold Anbang's assets, before relinquishing control last month.

The launch of the private flats also comes at a time when New York is seeing high volumes of prime stock. That is contributing to a fall in prices in the city in 2019, according to a report published by Savills, which tracks capital and rental value growth.

"The Waldorf Astoria has global name recognition, which draws interest from all corners of the US and the world," Wong said. "The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria will be a rare opportunity to own a home at one of the most celebrated addresses." New York is second to Hong Kong in terms of prime value at US\$2,510 per square foot in 2019, or 3 per cent lower than a year earlier, according to Savills Prime Index: World Cities. This year, prime residential capital value in New York is likely to remain flat or decline by as much as 1.9 per cent, the report showed.

"Tax changes at the beginning of the year have reduced demand for prime properties while purchasers have become wary near the top of the business cycle," the report said. "Additionally, Miami and New York both have a high volume of prime stock." Despite the uncertain times, high-quality assets will remain attractive, according to Georgina Atkinson, manager, residential, Asia-Pacific at Knight Frank. The starting price of a unit in The Towers also makes it "more accessible than most luxury products in New York City," she added.

"This is demonstrated by the number of enquiries we have received specifically from Mainland China and Hong Kong buyers, who are looking for a trophy asset investment opportunity in arguably the world's safest real estate market.

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