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Cary Tamarkin Doesn't Need to Make The Highest Building in The City

Cary Tamarkin is a rarity in New York's real estate world: He's both a developer *and* an architect. With that pedigree, he's not interested in doing the tallest, glassiest, loudest building on the block. He thinks about how a property will interact with its architectural and human neighbors alike. Notably, he's been behind projects like 10 Sullivan Street (known as the gateway to SoHo), 456 West 19th Street (at the base of the High Line), 508 West 24th Street (whose clock can be seen by the public on the High Line), and other residential spaces. *Whitewall* spoke with Tamarkin about the passion he's afforded in his work, and his latest development, 550 West 29th Street.

WHITEWALL: You've said in previous interviews that you knew you wanted to be an architect at an early age. Where do you think that came from?

CARY TAMARKIN: A couple of things. I was taking painting lessons when I was a kid and I also played a lot of guitar. There was a natural attraction. I used to sit around and spend days drawing. I took whatever classes were available at my high school. If you can make it in any of the arts, I can't think of a better life. I wanted to be a businessman as well as an artist. I used to think, "Would I rather would I rather design and build a pool for somebody? Or would I rather be resting in my pool and doing work for others?"

WW: So in being an architect and a developer, you get to choose the projects you work on, the clients you design for. That must be freeing.

CT: Yeah, because it's just meant for passion. There are all sorts of clients. There are clients who are involved and are smart and have a good design sense, and that can be a fantastic collaboration.

WW: The Shelter Island property and the Woodstock property are much smaller projects, so I imagine those must have been passion projects.

CT: Oh yeah, we spend most of our times doing much bigger buildings.

WW: So why did those projects appeal to you?

CT: The Shelter Island one is mine, so that was the most experimental design process. The opportunity to build your own house is such an unbelievable thing. This house in particular has become a legacy in the family. And it's got a real holiday house feeling to it. It's supposed to be a beach house; we aren't worried about this or that.

WW: You used glass in an interesting way in the Woodstock home, as well. From the front door you can see through the back.

CT: Yes, you can see through the courtyard. The house up in Woodstock has views of the mountains, a forest, and then a mowed lawn. It's got every type of landscape. The whole house is based around this courtyard, rooted from the earth.

WW: It feels like all the new developments in New York are big mostly glass. But that's not what your recent projects like 10 Sullivan, 456 West 19th, or 508 West 24th have been. Is that an aesthetic you try and stay away from?

CT: Yeah, when did glass become appropriate for a residential building? I am looking across the street now, and I can see cords coming out of computers, beds, stuffed animals leaning against the windows. Every website for various new buildings, every space is the same.

I'm doing this building now on 550 West 29th Street by the High Line, and it's all about spaces and light coming in. We did not want to do the same thing that everybody else is doing. We just had these drawings done that are deep black-and-white drawings that are all about light and changing shadows, standard things that a good architect uses: proportions and light.

WW: Can you tell me more about 550 West 29th?

CT: It's all about high living spaces that are kind of the heart of the apartment, and the spaces that surround that. They are mostly three-bedroom apartments. The area is changing so much. People are moving there for the Avenues School. And I am very interested to see what the arts influence will have on 29th Street. It forms this kind of community of people, and it's totally different than living on the 50th floor of a skyscraper. I don't want to build the highest building in the city—it's not appealing to me.

WW: Can you tell me more about the idea behind the poured concrete and clock at 508 West 24th?

CT: The poured concrete was really a far reach for us. It was such a brutal-feeling thing, and it's built on 24th Street directly between two thin, oddly shaped buildings. But I wanted to make a rock, something so solid that it gave these guys a chance to dance. And the clock is something on the High Line. There are millions of people who are going by the building. That clock is not just about inward focus, but establishing kind of dialogue with the people.