

Battle of the skies: London and New York compete for starchitects

By JAY MERRICK | 22 February 2015



When Sheikh Hamed paid £100m for the best residence at London's One Hyde Park apartment building in 2007, it confirmed the city as the world's premier deluxe property investment honeypot.

But even as Mayor Boris Johnson and Chancellor George Osborne plot to outpace the growth of New York and make London "the greatest city on earth", as they proclaimed last week, the Big Apple is taking deluxe living to astonishing new heights – and winning the competition to attract the best names in architecture.

High-rise living is the order of the day in New York, which is awaiting the completion of 111 West 57th Street, a weirdly skinny apartment building on West 57th Street in Manhattan, just 13m wide, but taller than the Empire State Building. There's also the 277m residential tower under construction at New York's Hudson Yards, and the planned 306m One57 building. Later this year, 432 Park Avenue will become the world's tallest residential building. And even that will be humbled by the proposed 539m Nordstrom Tower – that's more than 200m taller than London's Shard. Gehry's 76-storey skyscraper in Spruce Street, New York Gehry's 76-storey skyscraper in Spruce Street, New York

But it's not just about height in New York's ultra des res market. The USPs for hotshot residential developers such as HFZ and Sumaida + Khurana is to get superstar architects involved. Designers for recent New York apartment projects include Rafael Vinoly, whose uniquely reflective Walkie-Talkie building in the City of London fried eggs and melted cars. It has now been fitted with a "sunshade".

Norman Foster has a 61-storey stack of residences in going up in East 53rd Street. Zaha Hadid's impending apartment building in West 28th

Street will overlook the High Line. And, in Chrystie Street, there is a triple-whammy "tough luxe" design package: hotelier Ian Schrager, Tate Modern's architects Herzog & de Meuron, and interior designer John Pawson.

Architecture's "old masters" are also now at work in New York. The Japanese architect Tadao Ando is designing a Manhattan apartment building, and there are rumours that the legendary Portuguese designer Alvaro Siza has also been approached to "do resi".

London has struggled to compete, but is now beginning to follow the Big Apple's residences-by-starchitects strategy. Foster and Frank Gehry are composing a 1,300-apartment Electric Boulevard scheme next to Battersea Power Station. And the £1bn mini-Manhattan redevelopment of the City Road Basin will include two residential towers by Foster. Other schemes here include the Canaletto building (flats from £500,000-£5m) by Dutch design hipsters UNStudio; and another, the Lexicon, by the US mega-practice, SOM. Norman Foster's City Road scheme in London

Richard Collins, a leading development consultant, says the concentration of big-name practices working on residential projects in City Road is unique in London. "Prominent buildings have to be special. You have to pick special architects. If you have seriously ugly new buildings in London, it's depressing."

They will need to go some to beat New York's best offering: Gehry's shimmering, artfully rumbled 76-storey apartment building in Spruce Street, called simply "New York by Gehry" – a vertical architectural autograph on the Manhattan skyline.