

# New York's Latest Must-Have Luxury Apartment Craze Is Driveways

This ultra-rare city amenity offers privacy, security, and convenience. So to developers, it's worth sacrificing precious square feet of ground space.

by Mark Ellwood

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Jardim is the first New York project from Brazilian starchitect Isay Weinfeld: two, 11-story buildings in Manhattan's West Chelsea. Named after the Portuguese word for garden, the towers feature indoor-outdoor living, with roomy balconies and a shared courtyard, yet these aren't the features that set it apart from nearby projects—at least, according to its developer, Harlan Berger. The killer amenity here seems more prosaic: a private driveway that runs the entire length of the lot between 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> streets.

“Before we even bought the site, or hired an architect, we conceived of that private lane,” he confesses, by phone from his office in New York, “It was my secret marketing angle to deliver an amenity that didn't exist in the neighborhood.”

Berger might claim it's unique within the area but elsewhere in Manhattan, that same amenity—call it a driveway, motor court or *porte-cochère*—is emerging as the latest must-have for any building aiming to lure Manhattan's elite.

Take 565 Broome, the Renzo Piano-designed, 30-story megaplex in West Soho, where a gated driveway anchors the main floor. Or 1 Great Jones Alley, which would be better named 1 Great Jones Driveway: 16 apartments sit at the end of an historic laneway in NoHo, repurposed solely as a gated motor court where limos can idle. Two new Robert A.M. Stern projects also feature generous *portes-cochères*: 20 East End Avenue, where it's part of a landscaped entranceway with limestone fountain and a garden pavilion, and Tribeca's 70 Vestry which Tom Brady and Gisele have earmarked as their next New York *pied-à-terre*.

It's no wonder both are anchored by motor courts; Stern kickstarted this retro trend a decade ago by incorporating a driveway into the masterplan of his masterpiece, 15 Central Park West. Completed in 2008, that lavish \$950 million complex swiftly became one of Manhattan's most desirable—and expensive—addresses. Residents past and present include ex-Barclays CEO Bob Diamond, Marquis Jet co-founder Jesse Itzler and New York Yankee Alex Rodriguez; it even spawned a gossipy tell-all about the life of those residents, *House of Outrageous Fortune*.

“The motor court is the top feature of that building,” explains Corcoran powerbroker Julie Pham, by phone from her office in New York, “When 15 CPW made such huge numbers in sales and resales, developers zeroed in on how much the owners there absolutely love the driveway.” Such success turned 15 CPW into a winning template for future developers keen to earn similar cash and cachet.

## Safe and Discreet

The trend towards motor courts has accelerated notably in the last two years, according to Kent Security's Alon Alexander, who has seen a major uptick in inquiries from luxury developers on how best to incorporate the feature in an architectural brief. They're driven, of course, by twin concerns: privacy and security.

A private driveway essentially paparazzi-proofs a luxury building, preventing anyone from lurking curbside to catch a glimpse of boldfaced residents as they clamber from a limo. Cars can also safely linger in wait, which isn't always possible in an internal garage. Add subtle high security features like those Alexander offers, and it fortifies the complex to make it virtually impregnable. At Jardim, Alexander installed below-ground barriers, more common at government buildings, that can rise up and blockade the entrance. “West Chelsea is still a changing neighborhood, so security is very important there,” he says by phone from his office in New York. Cameras are mounted on the high-speed gates that rely on license plate recognition (and also record every

vehicle that arrives or departs) “It’s the most secure way for a vehicle entrance, and unlike RFID or clickers, if you’re expecting a visitor, you can just input their license plate so they can gain access rather than having to physically give them something.”

## Easy Entry

But it’s not just privacy and security; convenience is key, especially for families who are increasingly lured to Manhattan by the larger three- or four-bedroom apartments and new schools like Avenues—indeed, Harlan Berger says 35% of Jardim’s units have been purchased by buyers with children at that nearby elite school, which his own daughter also attends. Suburban buyers might take for granted something as simple as the bundling noisy children into the car without braving a busy street, but in Manhattan such handiness is a rarity. “In an age of Uber, convenience is a big deal,” adds Corcoran’s Julie Pham, “As a mom myself, I can go grocery shopping in a car in the rain and get, grab the stroller from the trunk and still stay dry. It’s also a safety thing—you don’t have to tell your kids to watch out for the car or the bike when they get out.”

There’s also a less concrete allure to motor courts: in a city where developers want to wring maximum value from every square foot, there’s an extravagance in leaving such a large space empty. It tacitly telegraphs a developer’s largesse and indulgence, at least according to Alon Alexander’s twin brother, Oren. He is a sales executive for 565 Broome. “A regular developer might squeeze a retail site, or extra amenities like a larger lobby, from that space but a driveway is the definition of luxury,” Oren says by cellphone, “It’s space where you don’t typically get it.” Jasmine Mir, CMO of Corcoran Sunshine, puts it more simply. “Buying a penthouse at the top of a building is one thing, but the sense of extravagance and luxury associated with having space at street level in a congested place like New York? It gives an amazing sense of *wow!* to any arrival, a real grandeur,” she says by phone from her office.

At Jardim, Berger acknowledges the concession he made—driveways “do take up space does take up space that could be a bigger lobby of even rentable retail”. He says it’s worth it, though, for the impact it offers long-term: it’s a shared asset that encourages neighbors to get to know each other. “When you build a condo building, eventually you hand it off and the condo board becomes a community, so you’re physically creating a way for people to interact in a way that doesn't normally happen.”