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The Classic Six: A Floorplan Favored for Its Flexibility

Some developers and well-heeled buyers are returning to the Classic Six, a beloved Manhattan floorplan that first gained popularity in the 1920s.




1 of 21

The living room in Mady Brown's 'Classic Six' apartment on Central Park West in Manhattan. A Classic Six typically has six main rooms: a living room, dining room, kitchen, two bedrooms and a smaller maid's room. *DOROTHY HONG FOR THE WALL ...*



By [CANDACE TAYLOR](#)

 0 COMMENTS

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In the race to sell luxury condominiums to affluent buyers, developers are touting everything from glass-encased mega-penthouses to “paparazzi-proof” [high-tech private elevators](#). But some developers and well-heeled buyers are returning to a throwback layout that first gained popularity in Manhattan in the 1920s—the Classic Six.

As the name implies, the Classic Six has six rooms: a living room, formal dining room, a kitchen, two bedrooms and what was known as a maid’s room, usually off the kitchen, explained Manhattan real-estate agent Thomas Di Domenico of the Corcoran Group. Add another bedroom to get a Classic Seven. Popularized by architects like Rosario Candela and J.E.R. Carpenter, the Classic Six is synonymous in Manhattan with coveted pre-World War II co-ops.

Now, developers are rediscovering the layout—with some twists. Robert A.M. Stern Architects has created a modern interpretation of the Classic Six in a new building, 20 East End Avenue, where prices range from about \$4.5 million to more than \$35 million.

In designing the brick-and-limestone building, developer Edward Baquero of Corigin Real Estate Group said the team studied New York’s “great prewar buildings” and worked to replicate some of their desirable features. The building has a motor court, wood-burning fireplaces and a billiards room with “cordial lockers” for residents to store their scotch.

But the units don’t have maid’s rooms, Mr. Baquero said, and they do have modern features like eat-in kitchens and built-in wine coolers.

In April, empty-nesters Nicky and Jane Yakubovich purchased a three-bedroom unit at 20 East End that had been listed for \$6.365 million after selling their house on Long Island. Even though it's a new building, "I like historic architecture," said Ms. Yakubovich, 51. "There's something grand about it."

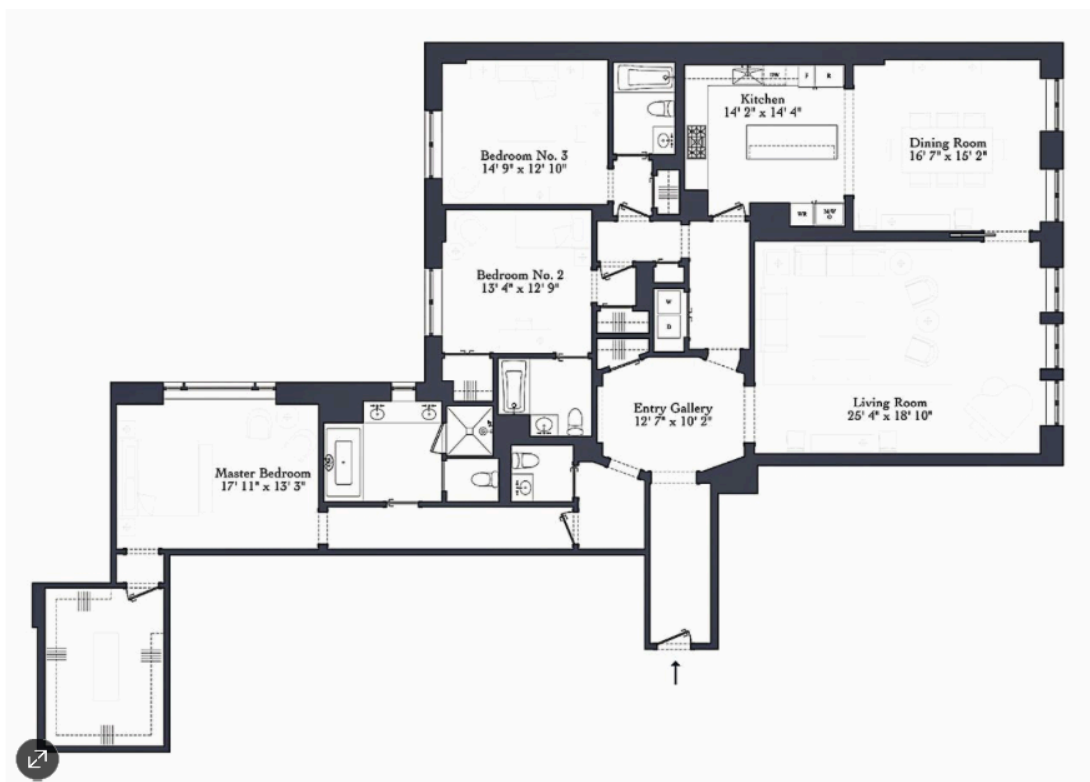
She likes that the unit has a formal dining room, where she plans to host family dinners and holidays. "In all the houses that I owned, we had a formal dining room," said Ms. Yakubovich. But she also likes the open kitchen. "I don't like the feeling when it's four walls, cooking by myself," she said.

Original Classic Sixes in New York range from about \$1.8 million to \$3.5 million, depending on location and condition, according to Manhattan real-estate agent Lauren Kende of Fenwick Keats Real Estate. Because there's a limited supply, they get snapped up quickly when they come up for sale.

Empty nesters and young families who opt for the city over the suburbs are driving the trend, brokers said. Many Classic Six buyers use the maid's room as a baby's room, or turn the dining room into a bedroom, Ms. Kende said.

In May 2014, Oren Novotny and his wife, Karen Robins, paid \$2.72 million for a Classic Six in a prewar co-op on the Upper West Side. They had been renting a one-bedroom apartment in the neighborhood and needed more space after their daughter Madeline was born. "Leaving the city wasn't anything we had an interest in," said Mr. Novotny, a 35-year-old software architect. "We'd both be bored." They also preferred prewar. "We looked at some condos but they just looked boring—there was no character to them," he added.

They weren't the only ones looking for those features. "The market was absolutely crazy," Mr. Novotny said. They looked at apartments with Ms. Kende for about seven months, and during that time they lost three bidding wars, he said.



A floorplan for a three-bedroom unit at 20 East End Avenue, a new building under construction on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Apartments in the building, inspired by prewar layouts, will range from about \$4.5 million to over \$35 million. ILLUSTRATION: SEVENTH ART

So when they encountered yet another bidding war on a Classic Six on the 16th floor of a prewar building, they offered 20% over the asking price. The strategy worked, and not a moment too soon: A few months after they moved into the apartment, Ms. Robins was pregnant again.

For now, new baby Samuel sleeps in his parents' room. Mr. Novotny uses the maid's room as an office, but shares the space with the baby's clothing and changing table.

When Mady Brown's children went to college 16 years ago, she and her then-husband sold their house in Westchester County and bought a Classic Six on Central Park West. "We always said we'd move back into the city—I missed it," said Ms. Brown, who recently listed the home for \$3.25 million with Brian Lewis of Halstead Property. She plans to move to Los Angeles to be closer to family.

Ms. Brown, 69, a retired chef and caterer, said she uses the maid's room as a guest room, which she says is "in constant use" by her family and friends.

She likes having a formal dining room, where she has a table that seats 12. The layout also separates the bedrooms from the public areas of the apartment—a hallmark of prewar design.

But like many of today's Classic Six buyers, Ms. Brown made a few changes: She removed a door to enlarge a closet and took a wall out of the kitchen to create an eating area.

Kate Wiser and her family paid \$1.8 million in April for a Classic Six on Central Park West to use as a pied-à-terre. After looking at about 20 apartments with Mark Friedman of Halstead Property, they settled on a fixer-upper with park views, said Ms. Wiser, a 51-year-old attorney who lives primarily in Princeton, N.J. They plan to use the maid's room as an extra bedroom. The kitchen and dining room will be combined into one large room. "It's just a more modern lifestyle," she said.

Developer Argo Real Estate has kept that in mind while converting a prewar Rosario Candela-designed rental building, 360 Central Park West, into condominiums. Units in the building range from about \$1.5 million for a one-bedroom to over \$6.5 million for a four-bedroom, said Argo President Mark Moskowitz.

The building's original layouts had enclosed kitchens and separate, formal dining rooms, Mr. Moskowitz said, but in the newly renovated units, the kitchen is open to the living room and dining room.

In other ways, however, his team tried to maintain the prewar feel. For example, the oak floors have a herringbone pattern, and the bedrooms are off a wide corridor, separate from the living areas.

Other cities are also seeing an increase in demand for classic layouts. In Washington, D.C., real-estate agent Daniel Heider of TTR Sotheby's International Realty said that's driven in part by empty nesters moving into the city.

Mr. Heider recently sold an apartment with a "very traditional" layout in a Georgetown building called the Wormley School, built around 1885 and converted into condos in 2007. The buyer, Jan Paulsson, chose a unit with a Classic Six-style layout with two bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, and a bonus room leading out to the garden.

Mr. Paulsson, a 65-year-old international lawyer, paid \$2.45 million for the apartment, which he plans to use as a pied-à-terre on his frequent trips to Washington for work.

Of course, traditional layouts aren't for everyone. Janet F. Schindler, a broker at Sotheby's International Realty in San Francisco, said buyers of prewar apartments there often "go in and rip everything out." They appreciate the building's amenities and architecture, she said, but want "a more contemporary floor plan."

Janet Lustgarten, CEO of software company Kx Systems, paid \$7.55 million in April for a three-bedroom, prewar apartment in San Francisco's Pacific Heights neighborhood. Ms. Lustgarten said the original dining room, living room and kitchen had been combined, with rooms delineated only by columns. Ms. Lustgarten can sit anywhere in the apartment and see San Francisco Bay through large windows.

"I love the big open space," she said.