

INTERIOR DESIGN®

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rev it up!

crosslines

the
sum of
their
parts

Professional and personal partners, Nancy Ruddy and John Cetra design holistically, currently focusing on preservation



Clockwise from top: A computer rendering of Walker Tower, a 1929 New York building being restored and converted to condominiums. The founders of CetraRuddy and Cetra/CRI Architecture. A custom velvet-covered headboard against hand-screened Manila hemp wall covering in a Walker Tower model guest bedroom.

In 1987—the year *The Simpsons* hit the airways, Whitney Houston just wanted to dance with somebody, and Prozac was first prescribed—the buzz in the design community included the professional partnership of architect John Cetra and interior designer Nancy Ruddy, a married pair of New York insiders who'd worked at Perkins+Will and Eli Attia Architects. They'd already collaborated and wanted to pursue what to them was a fairly obvious concept: designing entire projects—from inside out and outside in. A mere quarter century later, the combined firms of CetraRuddy and Cetra/CRI Architecture are 60 staffers strong and integrated design is still the sole focus. The namesakes spend most of the day at a round table in the center of their studio, working in tandem on everything from *parti* to finish and flavor. After two recessions, restoring many iconic buildings, and furnishing dozens of memorable interiors, it's still all about John plus Nancy, which currently equals adaptive reuse.



What was the impetus for this latest focus on converting large New York buildings?

Nancy Ruddy: From our beginnings, we've done adaptive reuse of historic buildings, and we've had a passion about inspired housing. They're each central to our perception of life in the city, so we love projects that combine both.

The firm's work is so contemporary, yet old buildings inspire you?

John Cetra: In college, I witnessed the loft typology emerging in SoHo, with its incredible potential so ➤

radically different from the cookie-cutter apartments in white-brick buildings going up at the time. We've converted the Barbizon Hotel and many of the cast-iron and stone classics in the Ladies' Mile Historic District, with their 12-foot ceilings and huge double-hung windows. Inside they may be little more than floor slabs and columns, but, like novelists, we romanticize their heyday and try to evoke those memories into the buildings' new lives.

So the interiors reference and interpret history?

NR: Yes, that's part of our inspiration. Our research often leads

craft and level of detail. But our love of loft-style living means adaptive reuse is about creating better and more inspiring housing.

How did those ideas work for Walker Tower?

JC: It was designed by Ralph Walker for New York Telephone in 1929 and we've made significant changes to make it work as condominiums. The interior and exterior details are a culmination of everything we've learned from historic projects in general. On the exterior, for example, we incorporated glass-and-bronzed-steel paneling into the existing brick facade. It looks art deco—like it was always there.

The interiors seem to capture the essence of Walker's vision.

NR: It's our proudest moment. We interpreted the studied majesty of art deco in living spaces that are less formal, more downtown, with a bespoke, crafted quality that recalls 1930's Paris. Everything you touch is like a jewel: The ebonized 8-foot-high doors and custom antique bronze hardware, French herringbone floors, and stepped ceilings. With more expansive windows and doors out to Walker's terraces and setbacks, the feel is more ➤



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Clockwise from top right: A French 1940's side table and a Marco Zanuso chair in a Walker Tower model master bedroom. A computer rendering imagining the penthouse of 141 Fifth Avenue, a condominium conversion. A custom mahogany desk in the sales center at the Barbizon/63, another New York condominium conversion. The brick facade of the former Barbizon Hotel for Women, originally built in 1929. Cipriani 42nd Street, which had formerly been the Bowery Savings Bank.

us to the original quarries and descendants of the craftsmen who worked on the landmark, like those involved with what's now a Cipriani in Midtown. So history informs the contemporary vocabulary of our interiors through this increasingly rare



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: THOMAS LOOF; COURTESY OF CETRARUDDY; ALAN SCHINDLER; JOHN CETRA; COURTESY OF CETRARUDDY

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From top: LEDs in the ceiling of Lincoln Square Synagogue. The 50-story One Madison Square Park.

like West Coast art deco, which works with the proportions and verticality of the 23-story building.

What about the common spaces?

NR: The lobby sequence is curated and sophisticated, with an 8-foot-tall chandelier and a new terrazzo floor inspired by the new façade paneling. We installed a new mural and a sculpted frieze, and wrapped them all in a classic art-deco interior to recreate a sense of the era. The clubroom is also quite beautiful in this way. In the model apartments, we went for eclectic wall coverings and carpets. Furnishings range from art deco to mid-century modern.

Your 2009 tower, One Madison Park, is unique on the skyline. What's your next new building?

JC: Just opening now is Lincoln Square Synagogue, what we believe is the first ground-up synagogue in Manhattan in the last 50 years. The facade has five curving ribbons of glass that symbolize the five books of the Torah, with stone pillars patterned to suggest a Jewish prayer shawl. It's the congregation's *shul* or sanctuary—literally their spiritual house. We enjoyed the challenge of trying to express Modern Orthodox Judaism in a contemporary vocabulary.

Is integrating interiors and architecture your biggest design challenge?

NR: That's what our clients come to us for. John is design principal and I direct all the interior-design work. And we work together on our sole interest: the best solution.

JC: It's great to discuss design ideas, but you also need to see what those ideas mean. So we draw them. With us, there are no sacred ideas, no politics, just collaboration and tracing paper. We have a shared passion for problem solving.

—C.C. Sullivan

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FROM TOP: EMMANUELLE SLOSSBERG; DAVID SUNDBERG/ESTO