

HAUTE PROPERTY Portfolio



“If there is one place to push your chips in, it’s New York,” says Singapore-based mega-architect Soo K. Chan, who has done just that with the game-changing Soori High Line building (16 private pools!) under way in West Chelsea. But the buy-in was steep: His firm is architect, interior designer, landscaper, and a principal investor. “At a certain point,” he explains, “you just have to say, ‘I’ll do it myself.’ I started out in New York; I got my license here. But nobody,” he laughs, “ever asked me to design anything.”

When last seen in these parts, circa 1990, Chan was a student at the Yale School of Architecture, interning in the city and knocking on doors to spread some love for a chair he’d designed. “I was just calling anybody who worked for a magazine,” he remembers. “People were very nice even if my chair, maybe, wasn’t really the best chair.”

He’s doing better with the chairs these days (among much else, Chan now creates furniture for Italian design darling Poliform), and his career—on its 25-year-loop from New York to New York—has reached something like nova proportions. Chan’s SCDA Architects (Soo Chan Design Associates) has built nearly 200 buildings worldwide, from highrises to museums to embassies, including his own hyper-luxury resort in Bali. And pools. Lots of private pools.

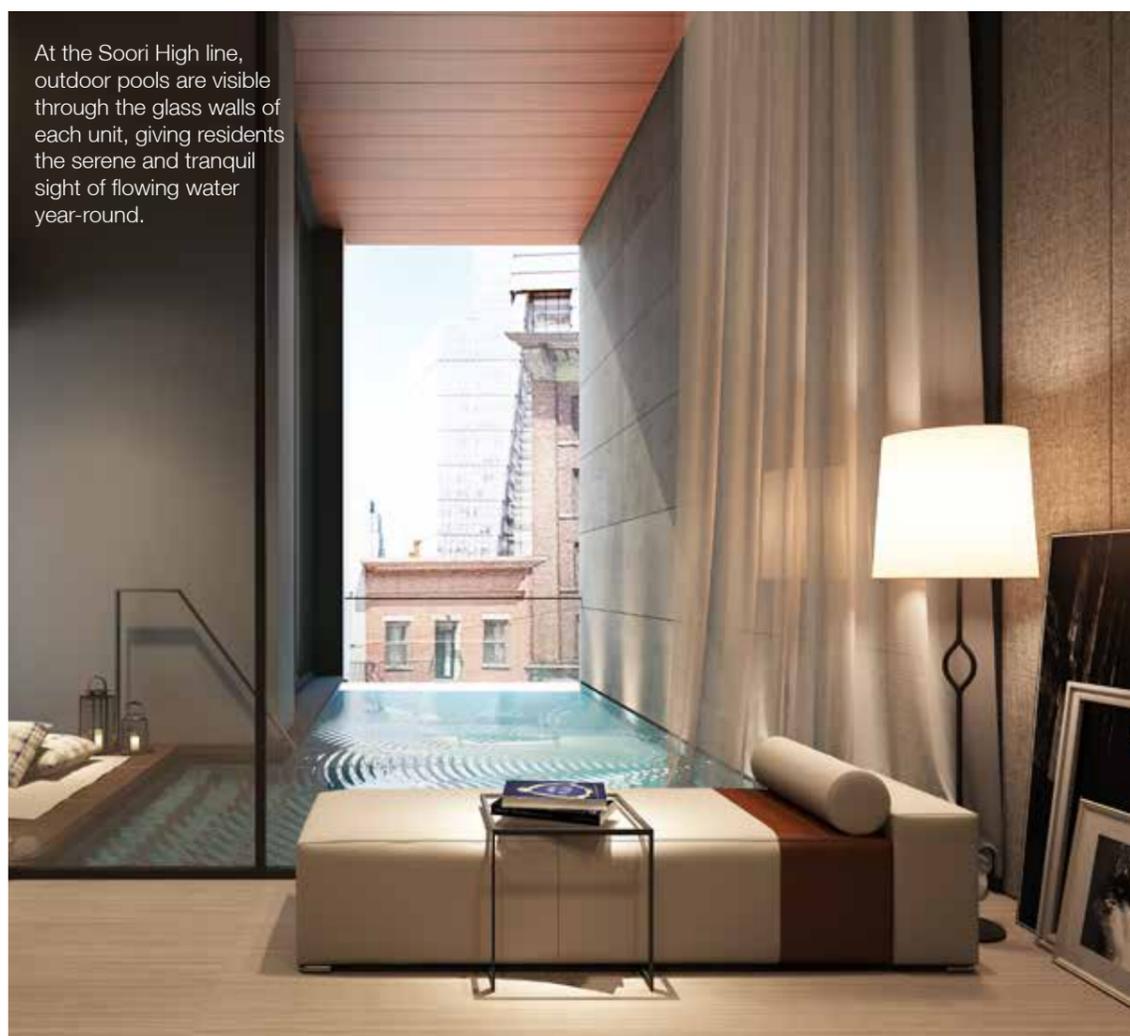
Design-conscious New Yorkers, if they can put Soori High Line’s much-clucked-over swimmin’ holes out of their minds for a moment, will have plenty of other reasons to thank Chan for the 11-story structure, slated to open at 522 West 29th Street in 2016. It is, for starters, an elegant addition to the High Line building boom, notable even in a neighborhood featuring projects by fellow starchitects Jean Nouvel, Robert A.M. Stern, Zaha Hadid, and Norman Foster.s.

Soori High Line—following much to-ing and fro-ing with New York building authorities—will realize Chan’s dream of literally “blurring inside and out.” Its curtain-glass façade, portioned by formal, wafer-thin, wood-clad vertical mullions, is punctuated by a series of open spaces for pools and surrounding terraces. (“The codes here don’t actually allow for that,” he notes. “You have to negotiate for how much you can dissolve the façade.”) Inside and out, the building has an organic, understated geometry and sense of airy proportion that typifies Chan’s neo-Modernist, Mies-meets-the-tropics aesthetic. (A second Chan building, down the street at 515 West 29th, will be showier, what with its wavy-glass top floors grafted onto the existing brick building and massive, rotating-exhibition “art wall” abutting the High Line. It is scheduled to open in 2015.)

DIVING IN

THE CITY’S LATEST STARCHITECT, **SOO CHAN**, SEES THE IN-HOME POOL AS THE LATEST CONDO MUST-HAVE.

BY RICHARD NALLEY



At the Soori High line, outdoor pools are visible through the glass walls of each unit, giving residents the serene and tranquil sight of flowing water year-round.



A bathroom at Chan’s 515 West 29th Street high-rise typifies his elegant, minimalist aesthetic.

Pools are an integral part of the decor at Chan's Soori High Line high-rise. Here, the pool is adjacent to the living and dining rooms.



Outfitting a residential building with 16 private pools is not a technical stretch for Chan, who has tucked 120 of them into his Nassim Park Residences complex in Singapore and nearly 100 more into a Kuala Lumpur high-rise. But still... nobody has done this in New York City for lots of good reasons, including our all-American menu of liability issues, the problems of humidity and condensation in a four-season living space, and winter freezes that burst pipes and cause watertight materials to expand and contract.

Says Chan, "We spent maybe one year debating it. Eventually I brought the whole team to Singapore to tour all the pools. I wanted to be sure they bought into it, because by then... it was too late! It was out there that we'd have pools in the building. Now we had to do it!"

Chan solved the indoor humidity problem in a typically Chan way: Tropics or no tropics, he didn't put the pools indoors. The four pools in the \$22 million penthouses are entirely exposed to the elements on roof decks, complete with their own dedicated boilers for heating, and under-deck snowmelting systems in case you fancy a skinny dip in a blizzard. The substantial 24-to 27-foot pools in 12 lower units (prices start at \$3.7 million) are part of the living space—even central to it—in the sense that they are visible through interior glass walls, their professionally calibrated rows of underwater lights casting soothing patterns on

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the ceiling. But there is no fourth exterior wall separating them from the outdoors. Even with their heaters, skimmers, and bubblers, the pools are designed to be swimmable only from, say, May to October.

And anyway, notes Chan, the voice of indoor aquatic experience, "Most of the time people don't even swim in them; maybe they use them a few times a year, but they like looking at them and having the tranquility of the water, hearing the sound of it.

Apparently New Yorkers, or at least an influential segment of movers and shakers, also like having Soo Chan around. After a 25-year drought, Chan is arguably Manhattan's "It" architect of 2014, signed on for three additional projects after Soori High Line, including that second building on West 29th. "New York is tough to break into," he observes. "But I think we've got some traction now."

At 515 West 29th, wavy glass top floors and a massive "art wall" were grafted onto the existing brick building.

