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Temple Court Gets a Luxe Revival

By JOSH BARBANEL

The long-hidden, glass-and-iron atrium of a landmark 1880s building in lower Manhattan is being restored, as the tower and an adjacent lot are transformed into an unusual hotel and condominium development.

Workers are stripping decades of paint and grime from the granite, brick and terra cotta facade of the nine-story office

building long known as Temple Court, at 5 Beekman St. near City Hall Park. They are also converting two turrets, each topped with pyramid-shaped roofs, into hotel rooms that will have bedrooms with 30-foot ceilings.

Next door, a contemporary 595-foot-high, 51-story glass and concrete tower is rising, echoing Temple Court's turrets with a pair of pyramid-shaped crowns.

The \$360 million project's de-

velopers and marketers say they hope it will draw cachet from the resurgence of lower Manhattan, much of it hinging on the opening of the first tower at the World Trade Center site.

Temple Court was built in 1881-83 by Eugene Kelly, an Irish-American merchant-banker, and designed by Silliman & Farnsworth as the demand for office space exceeded the supply farther downtown near Wall Street.

The atrium had been closed and boxed off for five decades, with the building emptying of tenants in more recent years. Plans were filed in 2003 to convert Temple Court to apartments. Five years later, two partners bought the building and its annex for \$61 million and made plans to turn it into a hotel. But following the financial crisis, the property went back on the market.

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Kevin Hagen for The Wall Street Journal

The glass roof at 5 Beekman St. was sealed for decades but will feature prominently in plans to convert the office building into a hotel.



Kevin Hagen for The Wall Street Journal (2)

Ironwork details, below, from the preserved interior of 5 Beekman St. in lower Manhattan, above.

Temple Court on Beekman Receives a Luxe Restoration

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In 2012, an investment group headed by Allen Gross paid \$64 million to buy Temple Court. He also bought a 50-foot-wide site next door for \$21.5 million.

The new Beekman Hotel will have 287 hotel rooms and will be run by Thompson Hotels. It will feature restaurants by Keith McNally (his Balthazar is in SoHo) and Tom Colicchio (his Craft is in the Flatiron District).

The condos, known as the Beekman Residences, are due to go on sale later this month, by Fredrik Eklund and John Gomes of Douglas Elliman. Prices for one-bedroom units start at \$1.2 million and for two bedrooms at \$2.9 million. The units have ceiling heights of just over 10 feet and contemporary interior designs by Thomas Juul-Hansen, a Danish designer who also did the interiors at One57, the new tower on West 57th Street.

Mr. Gross, who developed the 274-room Ace Hotel and the 168-room NoMad Hotel in the city, said he got inspiration for the Beekman venture while walking past the New York Palace, a hotel on Madison Avenue and East 50th Street. The Palace combined the Villard Mansion, which dates to 1882, with a 55-story modern tower.

At the Beekman, the developers are shifting much of the infrastructure needed to run the hotel to the new building, while



providing a large outdoor space on the roof of the hotel for the use of the condo owners.

The project is being developed by Mr. Gross's GFI Development Co. and GB Lodging LLC, a hotel investment and management company founded by Mr. Gross and Bruce Blum. Elliott Management Co. also invested in the project.

Mr. Gross said he rejected the name Temple Court for the venture because consultants said some people might think it was a synagogue. He also noted that other businesses, including a hotel in London, used a similar name.

The new building features exteriors with concrete embedded with a design found in some of the ironworks discovered in the

old building. "Many buildings can be translated to Abu Dhabi or Paris," said Randy Gerner, of Gerner Kronick + Valcarcel, an architect who is overseeing the restoration and new construction. "This one cannot."

A focal point in the new project is what the developer is calling the Living Room, a large sitting area within the atrium and beneath the glass skylight 130 feet above. Hallways angling away from a central shaft have iron ceilings supported with iron brackets cut into the shapes of gape-mouthed dragons.

Temple Court was on the cutting edge in the use of materials available at the time of its construction, Mr. Gerner said. It was built with steel piers on the exterior. The piers were clad in brick and decorative terra cotta to improve fireproofing, Mr. Gerner said.

Temple Court was recognized by the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1998 as the earliest surviving example of a tall fireproof office building, built before the skyscraper era transformed the New York City skyline.

Back then, a nine-story building was considered to be "in the clouds," according to an 1883 newspaper article. The article's author also reported that he had timed the elevator trip to the top of Temple Court at 30 seconds flat.