

At NYC's Ritzy Condo Buildings, Two Pools Are Sometimes Better Than One

Developers try to edge out competition — and avoid clashes over water temperature — by catering to both lap swimmers and families with kids.

By Jennifer Epstein
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One swimming pool isn't enough for some New York apartment buildings these days. A pool, once a rarity in the city's space-starved housing market, has become a must have perk for many condo buyers. Now developers are ratcheting up the amenities race by putting in a pair of them in their buildings, a move designed to satisfy both lap-swimming residents and those who just want a place to splash around.

Doubling up is a way for projects to stand out in a sea of ritzy offerings where enticements such as fitness centers, playrooms, yoga studios and even meditation spaces have become standard. It's also a way to sidestep fights over water temperature, like the ones that have erupted at some high-profile .

Keeping in mind those clashes — where lap swimmers want it cooler and parents prefer it warmer for their kids — Related Cos. opted for two pools at The Cortland, a West Chelsea condo tower where buyers started moving in late last year. Sales at the building have ranged from \$1.7 million for a one-bedroom residence to more than \$23 million for a five-bedroom unit, according to StreetEasy.

“It's definitely a luxury, but in high-end luxury now, it's what's the next best thing you can offer people?” said Andrew Orchulli, a senior vice president at Related. The second pool comes with “a lot of added costs but for us, it is also a differentiator.”

The building is full of large apartments that were marketed to. A whale themed playroom has a glass portal that looks onto the leisure pool, which is stocked with equipment for games such as water volleyball. The lighting is adjustable, and doors can be closed to separate the area from the lap pool.

“We created a separate space where kids playing and enjoying warmer water and pool games wouldn't necessarily interrupt the lap-pool swimmer,” Orchulli said. The lap pool's temperature is set to 78F (26C) in the mornings and raised to 84F in the afternoons, while the leisure pool is kept at 86F.

Other developers are expected to follow, said Amy Blitz, co-founder of Manhattan based amenities management company Urban Playground. She's seen the two-pool trend emerge over the past five or so years and is currently advising one project that's in the works.

Single pools have sparked controversy at a handful of prestigious buildings. After residents began moving into the Jenga-like Tribeca skyscraper known as 56 Leonard in 2016, lap swimmers lobbied for cooler water for the 75-foot (23-meter) pool, according to people familiar with the matter who asked not to be identified. A representative for Allied Partners, which manages the building, didn't respond to a request for comment.

Activist investor Daniel Loeb, a triathlete, did the same at 15 Central Park West, getting into a "conflict" with mothers in the building over the pool's temperature, author Michael Gross wrote in his 2014 book *House of Outrageous Fortune*. Both disputes ended in compromises, but their lore among real estate agents and developers has lingered.

Lap pools are generally kept between 78 and 82F, while temperatures from 84 to 86F are preferred for other uses, said John Dugan of American Pool New York, which works with developers on installation and maintenance.

"The temperature thing has always been the issue," he said. "Most lap pools we just keep at 83, 84, depending on the demographic of the building, and that tends to keep most people happy."

While second pools are meant to give a building an edge over the competition, there are three dual-pool buildings within just a few blocks in family-friendly Tribeca. One is Witkoff Group's 111 Murray St., which was earlier to the trend when it opened in 2018 and advertises a lap pool and a 25-foot splash pool. The former Art Deco office tower converted into condos at 100 Barclay St. has an 82-foot lap pool and a 330-square-foot (31-square-meter) children's wading pool billed on the building's website as "made for first lessons or just splashing around." Related's 70 Vestry St. also has a lap pool and a children's pool, as well as plunge pools.

At Witkoff Group's newest project, One High Line in West Chelsea, where closings are to begin in early September, there will be a pair of pools in the amenities area overlooking the Hudson River.

"Not every project has the space to do this," said Alex Witkoff, co-chief executive officer of his family's firm. But when future New York buildings do, the company will "for sure" include multiple pools.

In addition to demanding space and more money in construction, secondary pools come with extra upkeep costs, including one some developers may not expect, American Pool's Dugan said: a city-mandated second lifeguard. The massive Waterline Square complex from 59th to 61st streets on Manhattan's far west side solved that by connecting its 82-foot pool to a kids pool that can be watched by a single lifeguard, said Dugan, who worked on the project. The temperature is the same across both areas. The pools are filled with saltwater, which "feels silkier, smoother" than ordinary chlorinated water and has become popular in lap pools across the city in the past few years, he said.

Extell Development is putting pairs of pools into its new projects when it has the room. At One Manhattan Square, abutting the Manhattan Bridge on the Lower East Side, there's a 75-foot saltwater pool and a children's wading pool with a sloped entrance. They've been "huge draws for the building" and popular with residents, who can use an online reservation system to guarantee a lane, said Ari Goldstein, senior vice president of development at the firm.

Other Extell properties, including Central Park Tower on Billionaires' Row, have one indoor pool and one outdoor pool, giving serious fitness swimmers their own space apart from people just hoping to cool off on a hot day. The areas around pools are also socially important to the buildings they're in.

"It's a place where lots of different people will gather and hang out," Goldstein said.

In Dumbo, the 76-unit Olympia — where a condo that sold for \$17.5 million is the Brooklyn neighborhood's most expensive home — has two pools that will open in the coming weeks, including a year-round indoor pool intended to be used by lap swimmers. The outdoor "party pool" has stairs at both ends, which will signal to residents that it's meant for quick dips and splashing kids rather than for workouts, said Casey Drake, vice president of marketing and sales at Fortis Property Group, the building's developer.

But Drake can envision those hints getting ignored.

"We build amenities with a specific use in mind and it always surprises me to see how people use them," he said. "Maybe one day I'll see someone swimming laps in the party pool."