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First Ones In

Being the first people to move into a brand-new building may come with some risk, but it also has its perks.

By Alyson Krueger

Impressions: **29,984,446**

Samantha and Jasper Larsen were among the very first residents to move into 277 Fifth Avenue, and they wear that distinction with pride.

"We're the O.G.," said Ms. Larsen, a 30-year-old executive assistant at a private equity firm, referring to the term, "Original Gangster." "We got our foot in the door before the other tenants."

"Whenever someone new moves in we are like, 'Who is this?'" said Mr. Larsen, 30, her husband and a managing director at a financial services research firm. "This building feels like ours."

The couple moved into the 55-story condo tower a few blocks from Madison Square Park last April. Designed by Rafael Viñoly, the architect who envisioned the new home for Jazz at Lincoln Center, 277 Fifth Avenue is now the tallest residential building on Fifth Avenue. Building amenities include a gym with a yoga studio and a full spa with a sauna, and steam room.

Mr. Larsen and Ms. Larsen said that being the first to live in their apartment and among the first to move into the entire building had its perks. Their appliances were brand-new, never before used by anybody. The property manager solicited their advice about gym equipment (their wish for a Peloton bike is being granted.) And they were the first people to meet the doormen. "Now there are five times the people, and they still feel super close to us," said Mr. Larsen. "I think we are the favorites still hopefully."

An added bonus: they can say they were the inaugural residents of a significant New York City building.

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"I think out of our friend group we are the only ones who live in a brand-new building," said Ms. Larsen.

New residential properties have popped up all over New York City in recent years. In 2019 alone more than 20,000 new apartments are expected to come on the market. For the residents moving into them, it is a chance to feel special not only inside their building, but also among friends, family members and colleagues — affording them some social status of sorts.

"It gives people bragging rights," said Kemdi Anosike, a licensed real estate agent with Warburg Realty who has many millennial clients. "It makes them feel like they know something other people don't know."

Mr. Anosike has clients who don't just wish to be the first in a new building; they want to be the first to live in a developing neighborhood — even if it is a formerly industrial neighborhood and may not yet have residential basics like a local dry cleaner or grocery store. "They all want to say, 'I was there before it became what it is today,'" he said.

Jeremy Jacobowitz, 32, is a food-focused Instagram influencer with the handle @BrunchBoys. It is his job to show his 458,000 followers New York City's trendiest, most interesting spots.

To keep up appearances, he moved out of his prewar, five-story walk-up in Midtown two years ago and into 325 Kent, the first residential building, a rental, to open around Domino Park, the site of an old sugar refinery along the waterfront in Williamsburg. "I became an influencer, and I needed something different," he said.

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Jeremy Jacobowitz, a social media influencer, likes to boast to friends that he was one of the first tenants at 325 Kent, in Williamsburg's Domino development. Credit Katherine Marks for The New York Times

When Domino development is complete it will have four residential towers with 2,800 apartments, 600,000 square feet of commercial office space, 200,000 square feet of retail space, and a six-acre park. As one of the neighborhood's earliest residents Mr. Jacobowitz loves that he is a firsthand witness and therefore an expert on an area trendy New Yorkers are watching closely.

"This whole neighborhood is building around me, and it's super cool to be the first one in," he said. "Everyone always asks me about the hip, cool restaurants. They all want to talk about Misi, and I'm like, 'That's literally in my building.' When people tag it on Instagram I always comment, 'Hi, I'm upstairs.'"

Other New Yorkers get a thrill from living in a place where no one could in the past. At the beginning of 2019, Gus Michael Farinella, a 50-year-old attorney, moved into One Blue Slip, a luxury rental building in Greenpoint. "The building is located as far north in Brooklyn as you can go and as far west as you can go," he said. "The spot used to be full of garbage and overgrown grass and weeds. Nobody could have ever imagined putting up a residential building. It's amazing."

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Like Mr. Jacobowitz, he has enjoyed seeing a new part of the city being developed around him. "They are finishing putting up parks on either side, and they are hoping to put in a ferry slip," he said. "I've been watching the whole project going up. Everybody loves to visit."

Moving into a building that changes the skyline or is known as a starchitect's first New York City tower can also make residents feel like they are part of New York City history.

"There is always competition to be the first, to show you are different from the crowd," said David Kramer, a real estate developer who is opening One Clinton in Brooklyn Heights. "In the case of One Clinton, for example, it's a high-profile, sexy, well-located project, so it's going to be very fun for the first person who moves in."

"My building is kind of iconic already because people know it as the doughnut building because of its shape," Mr. Jacobowitz said of his rental in Domino Park. "Any time someone posts an Instagram story of views from the East Side of Manhattan, you can always see my building. I always reply and say, 'That's me!'"



Luca Andrisani (left), Jaime Boet (right), and their 14-month-old daughter, Elana Andrisani Boet at their home at 565 Broome Street. Mr. Andrisani, an architect, was attracted to the building because it was designed by the Pritzker Prize winner Renzo Piano. "I was interested to see how he dealt with a smaller scale," he said. Credit Katherine Marks for The New York Times

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Luca Andrisani, 46, an architect, and Jaime Boet, 41, a banker, moved into 565 Broome, a new glass tower in SoHo, in April. They chose the condo building in part because it was designed by the Pritzker Prize-winner Renzo Piano. "He is an architect I have been following since I was a kid," said Mr. Andrisani. "He's Italian as well, so it was a no-brainer for me." The building, which claims to be the city's first high-end zero waste residential building, has cobblestone walkways and expansive windows.

The building's notoriety has helped put the couple in the spotlight. "We just shot a segment for Open House New York," said Mr. Andrisani. "It is very exciting."

Of course being the first to move into a new building can carry downsides. Amenities including gyms and common spaces may not be fully complete. It also can be noisy with ongoing work. "The second building and the third building are under construction, but I understood that when I moved in," Mr. Farinella said about the ongoing development near his Greenpoint home. "If I close my windows I don't hear anything."

First residents often carry a lot of clout within their buildings.

Ms. Larsen loves the fact that the staff sought her opinion on what they should add to the building. "I said I wanted plants," she said.

Mr. Kramer said developers should reward the first buyers or renters with special treatment. "They came in early, and they took a risk," he said. He pointed out they often get financial benefits as well since prices tend to go up as buildings fill up and become more popular.



Pat Bernardi, one of the first people to move into the Eugene, in Hudson Yards, said he was blown away by the views from the building's roof deck. Credit Katherine Marks for The New York Times

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Pat Bernardi, 34, a software engineer, was the first resident in The Eugene, a luxury rental building close to the river in Hudson Yards. At the time he didn't give much thought to what this would mean. "I was mostly excited about the in-unit washer and dryer," he said.

He soon realized that he got special attention from staff. The doorman had very little to do since the building was almost empty, so he got to know him through long interactions. "I was having 10 to 15 minute conversations every time I left or came into the building," he said. "It was nice to build a friendship and a repertoire," he said.

Now, when he is in the lobby with other tenants or friends, the doorman always asks: "Did you know Pat was the first one in?"

"It is more of a funny embarrassment than a puff my chest out thing," he said. "But it is like I'm part of the furniture. It's nice to have something slightly more special than someone else."



Luca Andrisani (left), Jaime Boet (right), and their 14-month-old daughter, Elana Andrisani Boet, at their home at 565 Broome Street. Mr Andrisani, an architect, was attracted to the building because it was

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Katherine Marks for The New York Times



565 Broome Street claims to be the city's first high-end zero waste residential building.

Katherine Marks for The New York Times



The building's lobby has high ceilings and expansive windows to let in natural light.

Katherine Marks for The New York Times

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"Almost every building has a gym, but this one is almost professional, especially the swimming pool, which is beautiful," said Mr. Boet. "I wasn't even thinking about dropping my membership at my old gym before I moved in."

Katherine Marks for The New York Times



Mr. Andrisani and Mr. Boet said their friends and colleagues were eager to come visit to see one of New York City's newest and most talked about residential towers.

Katherine Marks for The New York Times

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*Mr. Andrisani, an architect, said he enjoyed designing his brand new apartment. "I mix in mid-century pieces with modern surroundings, so this building is ideal for me," he said.
Katherine Marks for The New York Times*



*Mr. Andrisani did not want to have to renovate an apartment. "A new building is so much better," he said. "Everything is new, and you get the latest things, and from a maintenance point of view, it's just so much easier."
Katherine Marks for The New York Times*

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