

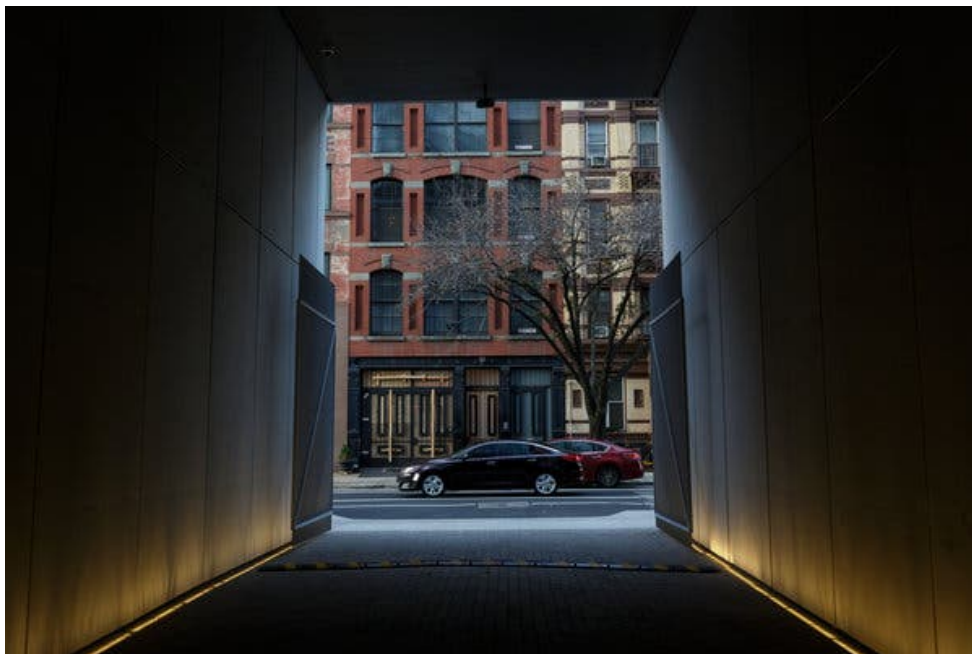
December 24, 2019
The New York Times

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Circulation: 972,774

The Hidden Perk That New York's Mega-Rich Now Demand

The porte cochère, a covered entry, all but disappeared decades ago. High-end buildings catering to car owners are bringing it back.



Credit...Anna Watts for The New York Times

Sean O'Connor drove his Jeep into the porte cochère and through the wide garage door at the far end and got out.

After that, the garage took over, but not with an attendant behind the wheel. The garage in Mr. O'Connor's luxury building in Lower Manhattan is automated. No one touched the Jeep as it was lifted to its parking space five floors above.

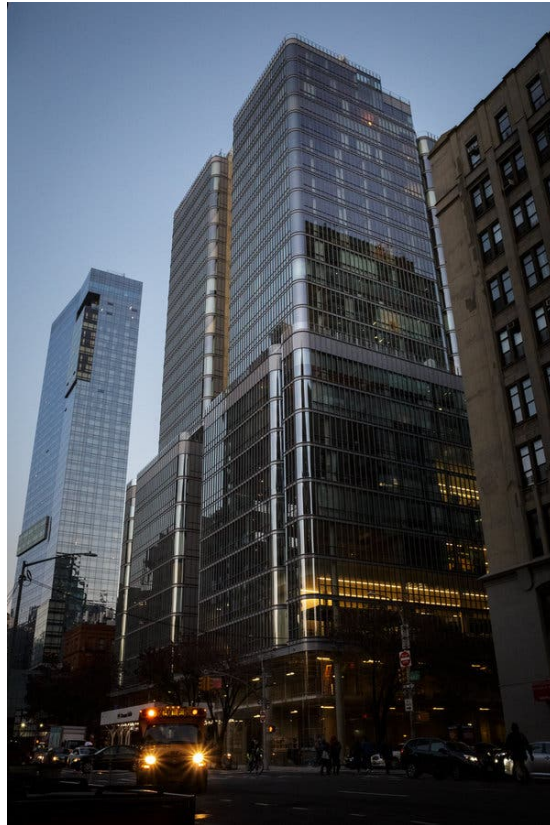
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The parking system is a high-tech twist possible in a building with a porte cochère, the urban version of a carport — a covered-driveway-and-entry combination that was popular in the days of horses and carriages.

“Porte cochère” — pronounced port KO-shair — is a French term that originally described an entrance to a building large enough for a coach to be driven into an interior courtyard. Think palaces. Think Louis XIV.

With New York experiencing a new gilded age, porte cochères are making a comeback in high-end buildings, like [565 Broome Street](#), where Mr. O’Connor is the resident manager and where the least-expensive apartment on the market is listed at \$3.925 million.



Covered driveways and entryways are making a comeback in high-end buildings in Manhattan, like 565 Broome Street. Credit...Anna Watts for The New York Times

The modern porte cochère is all about invisibility, or at least providing cover from prying eyes on city streets.

Celebrities, V.I.P.s and ultra-high-net-worth types, especially those who are not regulars in the gossip columns, do not want to be seen coming and going. The porte cochère is their shield from photographers, professionals and fans or mere passers-by with cellphones held high.

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In 2019 New York, many of those residents live in buildings where apartments sell for seven or eight figures. “Only a building that’s catering to a very affluent tenantry could afford to do this,” said [Mosette Broderick](#), a professor at [New York University](#).

Porte cochères take up space — more space than many New Yorkers’ apartments — and space is, of course, valuable. At more than 2,000 square feet, the porte cochère at [40 East End Avenue](#), a new building on the Upper East Side, is at least three times the size of the average Manhattan apartment ([733 square feet](#), according to the rental website [RENTCafe](#)).

At 111 West 57th Street, an 82-story tower on Billionaires’ Row, the developers created a porte cochère by scooping out a section of the former Steinway & Sons building.

The Waldorf-Astoria is dividing its famous porte cochère, really an underground passage running the width of the building between East 50th and East 49th Streets.

Half will serve the hotel that will occupy part of the building when a top-to-bottom renovation is completed in 2021, and half will serve the condominiums in the other part. The prices for the condos have not been announced.

“A private porte cochère has become a benchmark for buildings at this level, and really a requirement,” said Dan Tubb, the sales director for Douglas Elliman at the Waldorf. “There is a greater need to have a transition from the energy of the street, especially here in Manhattan, into a more serene and serviced environment.”

Such buildings have staffs that can help load the tote bags that residents take to their weekend houses in Connecticut or the Hamptons. To doormen and porters falls the responsibility of keeping up with the parade of look-alike Cadillac Escalades and Mercedes S class sedans.

Scott J. Avram, a senior vice president of Lightstone, the developer at 40 East End Avenue, called the porte cochère “more important than a lot of more traditional indoor amenities,” like private dining rooms, reading rooms and game rooms.

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A porte cochère is “more important than a lot of more traditional indoor amenities,” said Scott J. Avram, a senior vice president of Lightstone, a development company. Credit...Anna Watts for The New York Times

But some critics believe the porte cochère should never have been resurrected.

“It’s being brought back at a time when the need for cars is less and less apparent,” said Adrian Benepe, a former New York City parks commissioner.

In the last several years, the city has begun moving away from the car culture that has dominated the streets for much of the 20th century. Miles of bus and bike lanes have been installed, and New York is poised to become the first American city with a congestion pricing plan intended to get cars off the busiest streets. Starting in 2021, motorists will have to pay a toll when they drive into most snarl-prone parts of Manhattan.

Julia Vitullo-Martin, a senior fellow at the [Regional Plan Association](#), said car culture had “become the ultimate inequality” in New York.

“Very wealthy people not only have cars, they have one per adult — one S.U.V. per adult — in a household,” she said, adding that in some distant neighborhoods, residents need cars to connect with subway or bus lines.

By all accounts, the porte cochère’s heyday ended decades ago. Few buildings were built with them after World War II.

“They were going out of style when the automobile was still very much dominant,” Mr. Benepe said, “and now that public transportation alternatives are becoming more

December 24, 2019

The New York Times

dominant and the automobile is becoming less and less important as a means of transit, it's confounding that the porte cochere would be brought back."

But not to Mr. Avram on East End Avenue.

"The predominant buyer at this price point will have a car," Mr. Avram said. "Five million to 25 million. That's a homeowner and a car owner. A lot of them have drivers. So, whether you're driving yourself or being dropped off, a car is a part of your life."

For those who use Uber as their regular means of getting around, porte cochères are a plus, especially on bad-weather days, said William Sofield, the architect for the interior spaces at 111 West 57th Street, where the porte cochère is on the 58th Street side.

"You wait often," he said. "My own experience is you can wait for a very long time when it says the car has been rerouted."

The West 57th Street building took advantage of what it inherited — breaks in the sidewalk for driveways that dated to loading docks from when the building belonged to Steinway & Sons, the piano manufacturer. The old Steinway building is connected to a new structure that towers over it.



In a modern twist on the porte cochère, a fully automated system in a building in Lower Manhattan ferries cars to their parking spots from the ground floor. Credit...Anna Watts for The New York Times

Those breaks are known as curb cuts and "are extremely difficult to get," said Marci Clark, an architectural historian who is development director of JDS Development Group, one of the three developers behind 111 West 57th Street.

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The West 57th Street building is still under construction, as is the Waldorf. But one new building with a porte cochère has already made the gossip columns: 70 Vestry, where Tom Brady of the New England Patriots and his wife, Gisele Bündchen — whom Forbes lists as one of the [highest-paid models](#) in the world — were said to have bought an apartment on the 12th floor for \$24.5 million.

One of their neighbors who asked not to be named said the porte cochère added more than convenience to living in the building.

“You feel safe,” she said. “When you come home late at night, the taxi can drop you off in the porte cochère.”

Some older buildings have blocked off their porte cochères and no longer use them to accommodate cars. Arthur Weinstein, a lawyer who has lived at 924 West End Avenue since 1969, said the decision there was made years ago.

“People tried to beat the parking problem by sticking their cars inside” the porte cochère, he said. Besides, he said, the building’s porte cochère was never wide enough, he said. “We decided it had no good functional use.”

For 44 years, Ms. Vitullo-Martin has lived in a building with a porte cochère that leads to a courtyard with an urban garden — the Belnord, on West 86th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue.

She and her husband are rent-regulated tenants; in recent years the Belnord has been renovated as a condominium, with apartments listed for as much as \$11.45 million.

As the prices at the Belnord have risen, the size of the vehicles that drive into the courtyard has also grown.

“These S.U.V.s are like trucks,” said Ms. Vitullo-Martin, who does not own a car. “It’s as if the courtyard is open to the trucking industry.”