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Luxury real estate moving toward intrinsic

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Leonard Steinberg, a contributing editor to JustLuxe and executive vice president, Prudential Douglas Elliman, a high-end Realtor in New York City, outlines what he's seeing in the luxury real estate market:

Real Estate: The term "luxury" in real estate is changing. Two types of luxuries co-exist and are equally important: cosmetic and intrinsic. Luxury in real estate is shifting more towards the intrinsic. A whole new luxury vocabulary has emerged and it extends well beyond the words Sub Zero....

With the significant growth in wealth over the past decade, "sameness" has become the enemy of the luxury market. A high price does not necessarily guarantee luxury. Until recently, an Italian Boffi or Varena kitchen with Viking or Miele appliances, a spa bathroom or lavish swimming pool, set the tone. Nowadays, these are pre-requisites. Real luxury lies in customization and uniqueness, the quality of materials and the skills required to produce them, often the most difficult things to find or create. New luxury is found in the convenience, ease of use, quality of engineering, reliability and efficiency of design. Intrinsic luxury focuses on room proportions, ceiling heights, flow of space, light, views, privacy, security, etc. On the cosmetic front, a unique light fixture, artwork, or custom designed, hand-crafted cabinetry can make the "new luxury" new.

Interior designers are under greater pressure to create homes that differentiate themselves from the rest of the pack. This has resulted in a mini-revolt against the modernist movement that has prevailed recently. Re-claimed items are being incorporated again into interiors alongside collector quality antiques and one-of-a-kind pieces. The modernist aesthetic will remain strong, but it will be re-defined because of the ease of good, inexpensive replications at much lower price-points. Home design of the future will incorporate technology extensively. Lutron programmable lighting and Crestron systems are becoming the norm. (A plasma TV used to be a luxury...now every room has one!)

Architecturally, what is so luxurious about a flat glass building that could be in any city anywhere in the world? The best architects and designers tap into the surroundings of a project for inspiration, incorporating materials and contextual, stylistic elements that make the end product unique to its location and setting. A stronger sense of environmental responsibility and "green" architecture is emerging rapidly. Is the newest luxury a self-sustainable home?

The ultimate test for the best luxury real estate is how easily it can be duplicated. Collector-quality real estate is the most valuable luxury of all.

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