

# Dolly Lenz

WITH JENNY LENZ



A property at 655 Park Ave, New York, with an asking price of \$US3.75m

INTERIOR DESIGN

## Negotiating the quirk factor

Over decades in the luxury real estate market, serving some of the world's most discerning ultra-high-net-worth buyers and sellers, we've encountered virtually every personality type imaginable, and witnessed design choices ranging from slightly cringeworthy to genuinely bewildering.

While most clients express their personal style with enough restraint to keep a property broadly marketable, there are always exceptions. A handful of homes stand out vividly. They're the ones where the owner's personality and design vision were so polarising that they remain etched in our memory as some of the most unusual residences we have ever encountered.

Good interior design is inherently subjective; what appeals to one person can be absolutely terrifying to another. Among the most unusual design features we've experienced was an apartment we marketed on Central Park West. Situated in one of Manhattan's most storeyed pre-war buildings on a highly coveted avenue, the apartment should have been an easy sale. Buyers typically rush to purchase properties in this location.

However, there was one significant issue: the owner had filled the apartment with more than 200 pieces of taxidermy. These preserved animals ranged from massive moose heads mounted on walls to life-sized stuffed black bears greeting guests at the entrance. It was essentially a zoological exhibition, more akin to a mountain lodge than a luxurious Manhattan residence.

Although the owner was extremely proud of the collection, which was valued at well over \$US1m, potential buyers felt quite differently. Many were deterred merely by viewing online images, and those who visited in person were, to put it mildly, unsettled.

This apartment became an good example of design gone wrong.

While the taxidermy-filled apartment certainly takes the prize for the most unusual design feature we have encountered, we have come across several other examples that leave us shaking our heads in disbelief. There have been large bathtubs and swimming pools oddly situated in the middle of living rooms, and full medieval or gothic-themed interiors in unexpected locations. These elements may seem intriguing or edgy to the homeowner, but they can become significant burdens when it's time to sell.

Today's buyers often shy away from properties requiring major renovations, and many lack the vision to look past eccentric design choices. The initial joy of that living room swimming pool quickly diminishes as the property languishes on the market.

Designing a home can indeed be a magical and deeply personal process, and it's entirely normal for homeowners to infuse their personalities into their spaces. After all, it's their home, and they should feel comfortable in it. However, when clients seek our advice, we always recommend considering future marketability before making bold design decisions. Most heed this advice, but there will always be a few eccentric individuals who push creativity to extremes, regardless of how their choices might be perceived. Although we might not always agree with their style, we will be there to help them sell when they're ready for their next project.

*Dolly Lenz heads New York-based Dolly Lenz Real Estate and has sold more than \$US13bn worth of luxury US and international homes. Jenny Lenz is managing director of Dolly Lenz Real Estate. [dollylenz.com](http://dollylenz.com)*

# Local aspect

DAVID HICKS

## David Hicks

We have completed two projects that, while not particularly unusual, elevated security to a whole new level. In one, we reinforced the walls of a walk-in robe with metal plates before applying plaster and the finishing touches. This transformation created a secure space to store expensive bags and jewellery, effectively turning it into a large safe. In another project, we designed a bedroom with reinforced walls that included an automatic sliding-door panel. When activated, this feature converted the entire suite into a panic room. As security and amenities in homes continue to be a priority, we are seeing an increase in such requests. On a more unconventional note, we were involved in a new build that incorporated a full-size indoor cricket pitch alongside a half-pipe skateboard ramp. We have had inquiries ranging from glass-sided pools that are visible from lower levels to professional-grade commercial kitchens. We've also had fun briefs that include underground bars, nightclubs, and comprehensive wellness centres complete with gyms, steam rooms, saunas, ice baths, sensory showers, flotation tanks and cryotherapy facilities. While these projects may not seem unusual to us, they might appear extraordinary to others.

SOTHEBY'S INTERNATIONAL

## Antoinette Nido

Two of the most unusual properties I've ever sold are polar opposites. One was 234 Kooyong Rd, Toorak, a unique "art house" and award-winning design by Kirsten Thompson. It was conceived as an "apartment house" around a brief for a single-level, elevated and secure dwelling with views. This one-of-a-kind contemporary residence was brilliantly conceived around a lush, leafy Fiona Brockhoff designed central courtyard garden, creating a serene and beautiful sanctuary. All the primary living spaces of the house are on the first floor, accessed by a lift or sky garden stairs, and straddle the lower-level garage, outdoor gym and studio apartment. Nothing about this residence was conventional, including the "hit and miss" brickwork, a Corian kitchen, polished concrete floors, and surprisingly, a traditional Victorian freestanding clawfoot bathtub. Kerstin Thompson went on to win the World Architecture Medal in 2023.

AYRE REAL ESTATE

## Adrian Wilson

One of the most distinctive properties I've sold recently was in the iconic Astor building – a true Sydney landmark that celebrated its centenary in 2023. Built in the 1920s, The Astor was a symbol of optimism and elegance, setting the benchmark for mansion-style apartment living. According to the National Trust, it achieved several historic firsts: Australia's tallest residential building at the time, the first of its kind in concrete construction, and the country's first co-operative housing model. Over the decades, The Astor has attracted a long list of notable residents. The apartment in question was an extraordinary amalgamation of two original residences that created a generous 200sq m floorplan. Originally four bedrooms, it had been reconfigured into a grand two-bedroom layout, with an expansive master suite reminiscent of a countryside estate. A baby grand piano – clearly considered during the redesign – was a centrepiece of the living space and included in the sale. Unique historical features such as the original dumbwaiter (once used to deliver meals from the building's lower-ground restaurant) remain, and the rooftop terrace offers sweeping views of the Harbour and the Opera House – a stunning backdrop for the resident gatherings that continue to bring life to this heritage address.