

Family Compounds, by Elevator

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Neil K. Aggarwal and Ritambhara Kumar hope to buy a second apartment in their building so their parents can spend more time with their child.

Some parents dream of owning a home where their adult children and grandchildren also can live. For those with the means, that translates into a family compound, with several generations living in their own houses within the same property line. But here in New York City, creating such expansive homes can be prohibitively expensive. Nevertheless, a lucky few are building multigenerational compounds in the sky.

At [10 Madison Square West](#), a 125-unit condominium at West 24th Street where asking prices top \$4,000 a square foot, four separate families are hoping to create multigenerational homes. In each case, parents bought apartments for themselves and then a second, noncontiguous unit for their adult children.

It was the same at [150 Charles](#), a luxury condominium under construction in the West Village: two families have each bought two units. “We think it is fabulous, just a beautiful, special thing that the families will eat meals together, spend time together,” said Steven Witkoff, the developer who is building both 150 Charles Street and 10 Madison Square West.

“Citywide,” said Leonard Steinberg, a broker at Douglas Elliman, “there is a trend toward much larger apartments, where families want to create a suburban scale here in the city. The very wealthy in Manhattan today look at the very wealthy in other cities like Boston and see that their friends have 20,000-foot-houses — they want the same thing here and don’t want to compromise.”

This suburban-to-urban trend is driving developers to rethink the layouts of many of their condominiums and to create larger apartments, or configurations conducive to combining units. “It is called mother-daughter homes in the suburbs,” said [Ziel Feldman](#), the founder and managing partner of HFZ Capital Group. “We are trying to orient our buildings for larger apartments rather than smaller, although not every building lends itself to that.”

At [11 East 68th Street](#), the conversion of a circa-1913 Beaux-Arts Revival-style building into condominiums where five-bedrooms come with \$22 million asking prices, Mr. Feldman is in talks with a prospective buyer to combine units to create a floor-through apartment totaling 9,500 square feet. At [305 East 51st Street](#), another of Mr. Feldman’s developments, a buyer is considering buying several contiguous units on a single floor that he may or may not combine, “for the kids and grandkids to have a place,” he said.

Lena Diab was having a tough time finding at least four bedrooms to house herself, her husband and their two children.

“Four-bedrooms are almost unheard of in the city,” she said, “and if they do exist, they are either really expensive or need a lot of work.” To complicate matters, Ms. Diab, who runs the American arm of the fashion label Moka London, also wanted quarters in the same building for the occasional use of her mother and sister.

For her immediate family, Ms. Diab bought two two-bedroom apartments that she is in the process of combining at [One Museum Mile](#), a new condominium development at 1280 Fifth Avenue designed by Robert A. M. Stern Architects. Two-bedroom apartments on the sixth floor, where Ms. Diab will live, are priced just shy of \$1.6 million, according to [Streeteasy.com](#).

“Wherever combinations are possible, people are jumping at the space to expand before someone else comes along to purchase it,” said John Harrison, a broker at CORE who represents One Museum Mile.

Ms. Diab also bought a third two-bedroom apartment one floor above as a pied-à-terre for other members of her family to stay in when they come to visit. When construction is completed in December, Ms. Diab and her relatives will own a 3,000-square-foot four-bedroom home and a second 1,800-square-foot pied-à-terre.

At a time when even homes in the boroughs outside [Manhattan](#) are asking astronomical numbers— a town house in Park Slope, for example, will shatter a price record if it achieves anything close to its \$15 million price tag — affording such elbow room and privacy can be difficult.

“We are that class of New Yorkers that aren’t wealthy, but also are not living below the poverty line — we are properly middle class,” said Neil K. Aggarwal, a 35-year-old psychiatrist who lives with his wife, Ritambhara Kumar, and infant daughter in a two-bedroom on the Upper West Side. The couple are looking, so far without success, for an additional apartment in their building so that at least one set of parents can move in. Mr. Aggarwal’s parents live in Pittsburgh, his wife’s in Mumbai, India.

“We want to remain connected to our families in a more durable way than daily telephone and Skype sessions,” Dr. Aggarwal said. “In New York, we have very diverse friends, and it is really the culture of capitalism, of big-city life here. But because we don’t have a strong South Asian community like we had when my wife and I were growing up, having grandparents here would be a great way to teach our daughter, Amaya, our cultural traditions.”

Vik Kukar, Dr. Aggarwal’s broker, is trying to make this goal a reality. But “all of Manhattan is at the lowest level of inventory in 12 years and the Upper West Side is just ridiculous,” said Mr. Kukar, who is affiliated with Rutenberg Realty. “It is not easy to find a two-bedroom condominium that is in good shape with a decent view in their neighborhood, let alone their building.”

On the East Side, Patrice Jacobs has managed to create the kind of community the Aggarwals are seeking. Ms. Jacobs and her husband live in a penthouse at the Brompton, a 22-story condo at 205 East 85th Street. Also resident in the building are her two daughters, their husbands and four grandchildren, ranging in age from 2 to 7. They see one another every day.

“It is so easy for me,” Ms. Jacobs said. “If someone needs to walk the dog and one of the kids is sleeping, I can go downstairs in my bathrobe — I’ll take the service elevator if I’m in my bathrobe.”

The Jacobses bought their units together, and the developer, the Related Companies, seemed “happy to have one family buying three apartments, since my daughters got good deals,” Ms. Jacobs said. “Mine was a penthouse, so I’m not sure how much of a deal we got.”

Public records show that Ms. Jacobs paid about \$5 million for her unit back in 2010. A similar penthouse sold earlier this year for \$9.55 million.

But some buyers who want to create a family compound by acquiring several apartments may experience pushback from the building, particularly if it is a co-op. Boards might be concerned about a single family’s owning a majority of the co-op’s shares and thus being able to control much of what happens at the building, said Mary Ann Rothman, the executive director for the Council of New York Cooperatives and Condominiums.

“It can also be a gentrification issue,” Ms. Rothman said, “because when people can afford to buy multiple units, they probably will want a higher level of service than people who bought years ago and may live on a fixed income.” She added that at her building on the Upper West Side, “many years ago we made a rule that no one can own more than two apartments, and they have to be contiguous.”

The co-op board at 170 Second Avenue in the East Village thwarted an attempt by Amanda Rubin and her family to expand the number of apartments they own there. Ms. Rubin, 56, has lived at the building in two combined apartments for more than 30 years, and the family owns a third, smaller unit as well.

But when her sister relocated with her five children to New York City from California and made a successful bid on a fourth apartment, the building balked. “The co-op board wouldn’t approve her,” Ms. Rubin said. “It was devastating.”

“We are a really wonderful building with a very strong community spirit,” said David Seres, the president of the building’s board, “and we are very happy to have families in the building, because it supports the community spirit. But we were concerned that at the same time, we didn’t want there to be an imbalance.”

To that end, the building instituted a policy to allow up to three apartments to be owned by any given family. “This way,” Dr. Seres explained, “a smaller group of people doesn’t have a larger block of the votes.”

Henry Hershkowitz, a broker at Douglas Elliman who also lives at 170 Second Avenue in two combined units with his partner and their two young children, persuaded his parents to buy there a few years ago when they decided to move to New York City from the suburbs.

“I had just had children and loved the idea that they would be around to help,” Mr. Hershkowitz said.

Recently, his mother died. “It was a gift that we were able to be all together during that difficult time,” he said. “And now that my father is on his own, I can more easily care for him.”

It is a sentiment echoed by those who consider themselves lucky to have several generations living under a single roof.