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REAL ESTATE

Power Lifting of a Residential Kind

Jay Wright, Gym Guru for High-End Condos

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Jay Wright and his Wright Fit company are behind several high-end fitness centers in luxury residential projects.
Fred R. Conrad for The New York Times

Izak Senbahar, the president of the Alexico Group and co-developer of [56 Leonard](#), the undulating tower that redefined TriBeCa's skyline, didn't hesitate when it came time to select a fitness guru to assemble what, in his opinion, is the most pivotal amenity component of a luxury residential project: its fitness center.

Mr. [Senbahar](#) turned to Jay Wright, the chief executive of [the Wright Fit](#), a company specializing in functional performance training that has a staff of 76 and expects to double in size by the end of the year. It was formed in 2007, shortly after Mr. Wright made a splashy residential debut with a benchmark fitness center at the much-scrutinized [15 Central Park West](#). For that building, Mr. Wright proposed, and pulled off, a costly facility with the most inventive cable-based machinery available, all of it cardiocentric and all of it compatible with the space designed by Robert A. M. Stern Architects.

"What they got was the best residential gym, not just in [New York City](#), but one of the best gyms anywhere," Mr. Wright said. "When 15 CPW not only survived the recession, but thrived, other developers took notice of the recipe that went into it."



The fitness center that the Wright Fit, installed at 50 United Nations Plaza, one of the luxury condominiums for which the amenity is a selling point. Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

Mr. Wright leveraged his share of the recipe, and his instant renown, by signing up for similar high-end projects with a variety of developers, including Mr. Senbahar and his trophy tower, 56 Leonard, which will feature a fitness center installed and managed by Mr. Wright. “Nobody else was doing what we were doing at that time,” he said.

For luxury condo developers, adding a 15 CPW-caliber facility to the amenity package is a status symbol and selling point. “We’re like insurance,” said Mr. Wright, who is currently in negotiations to design, install and operate a 60,000-square-foot space for a multibuilding project on the Upper West Side.

Of course, Mr. Wright has plenty of competition. But he gave himself early traction in the fitness business by anticipating the amenity trend at luxury residential developments and by networking with developers.

“We interviewed five health club management companies,” said William Lie Zeckendorf, a developer of 15 CPW, who had trained with Mr. Wright downtown at the [Peak Performance](#) gym on West 21st Street, “and Jay made one of the finest presentations I’ve ever heard on fitness, where fitness is going, fitness facilities in private buildings, a higher level of service with more programs, just a brilliant presentation. So we hired him and he was a tremendous hit there, in my opinion.”

The lavish but no-nonsense expanse of cutting-edge exercise equipment, opulent stone locker rooms and the dazzling pool with adjacent sauna and lounge created a place where billionaires felt right at home while working up a sweat. Some even showed up in their bathrobes each morning. Other developers, impressed by the facility at 15 CPW, secured Mr. Wright’s input for their signature projects.

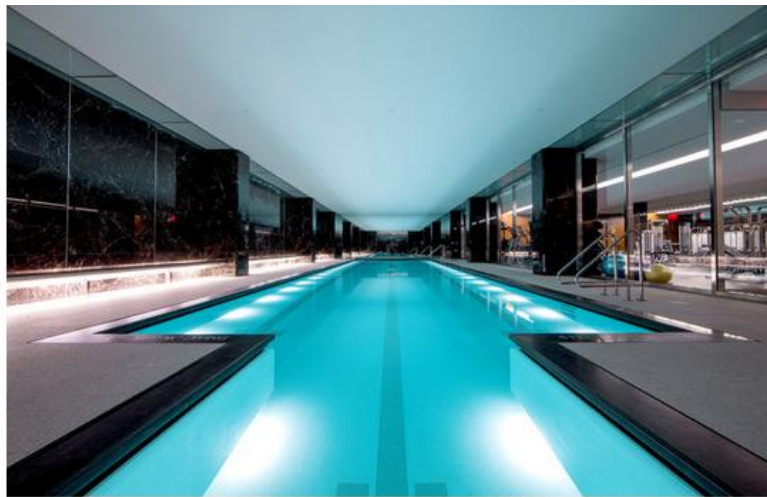
High-end fitness centers have become a mandatory amenity and, at \$1,000 or more per square foot not including equipment, an expensive one. “Modern-day torture chambers,” suggested Mr. Senbahar with a laugh, “and you need to have the best.”

The Wright Fit design studio is in the Flatiron district at 900 Broadway. Mr. Wright, who majored in political science at the University of Tennessee and impetuously dropped his plans for law school in favor of an eight-year modeling stint, segued into fitness as a career path in 1998 at the now-defunct Duomo gym.

He researched scientific literature on progressive fitness programs and gym equipment, and starting in 2004, refined his management and marketing skills while running Peak Performance, the 10,000-square-foot fitness emporium he co-owned before transitioning into luxury residential projects on a hunch that fitness and wellness facilities were the next must-have amenity.

Whippet-toned with a raffish hipster hairdo, Mr. Wright, 46, is as passionate about promoting spiritual and nutritional health as sculpturing physiques.

“Spinning and cross-fit training may be fashionable, but I don’t design to fads,” he said. “This industry is evolving toward training that focuses on functional longevity: It’s a scary proposition to think of the wheels starting to come off the bus when you turn 60 or so. When I’m in my 60s, I still want to be able to snowboard with my kids.”



The pool at 50 United Nations Plaza's fitness center. Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

He lives in a NoHo loft with his wife, Gia, a jewelry designer, their 4-year-old son, Tiber (their second child is due in March), and no gym equipment. He works out almost daily at Peak Performance and also skis, surfs, snowboards and plays tennis.

“I used to live in the gym when I was a teenager,” said Mr. Wright, who hung out with the power lifters and strength coaches at the University of Tennessee, where his father was a professor of philosophy.

“I devoured Conan comic books at 10, had my hopes of playing football shut down by a knee injury, and was always fascinated by fitness. As a guy in the modeling business, you had to stay body conscious, because it seemed like every other casting agent told you to take your shirt off. I’ve never not been fit,” he said with a shrug of his well-defined shoulders.

Mr. Wright's brand has been adopted by a who's who of seasoned developers: Zeckendorf Development and Global Holdings (15 Central Park West, [18 Gramercy Park](#), [50 United Nations Plaza](#)), the Rudin Family (the [Greenwich Lane](#)), Harry Macklowe and CIM Group (432 Park Avenue), Michael Stern of JDS Development Group ([Walker Tower](#) and 626 First Avenue) and Steven C. Witkoff ([150 Charles Street](#)). He is overseeing the 17,000-square-foot fitness space at Jean Nouvel's chic MoMA tower at 53 West 53rd Street, and the Related Companies hired him for [15 Hudson Yards](#).

"The well-designed in-house fitness center has become the norm in the industry," said Eric Rudin, the president of Rudin Management. "It's a great amenity that people love, there's a huge convenience factor, and it adds real value to a residential project. With Jay, he's so knowledgeable about installing the right equipment and having the right flow and overseeing it, that it's like one-stop shopping, so we gave him a blank slate," he said, referring to the Greenwich Lane, the elaborate development on the former St. Vincent's Hospital campus.

Mr. Wright's vision for holistic fitness extends far beyond bulging biceps and is open to future experimentation: Why not, he reasons, combine the rigors of a Paleolithic menu with the ministrations of a top-flight sommelier? Why not enhance the fitness experience by adding a spa?

"You don't dare call it a gym anymore," said Mr. Senbahar, "and you don't bury it in the basement. Jay is a superb strength and performance specialist with tremendous scientific knowledge. I mean, he practices all of this stuff himself. He told me he follows a cave man diet. I'm more evolved, strictly on a pizza diet. But seriously, when you see him and how fit he looks, he makes you want to exercise."

Mr. Wright furnished the gym at Mr. Senbahar's house in [the Hamptons](#) and advised Mr. Rudin on the best treadmill for his personal use, a \$17,000 [Woodway](#).

Mr. Wright also installed a Wright Fit fitness center at the developer [Vladislav Doronin](#)'s swank [Oko Tower](#) project in Moscow and has projects in Honolulu and San Francisco.

At Duomo and Peak Performance, he was a sought-after trainer with a client list that included Naomi Campbell, Mariska Hargitay and Graydon Carter, the editor of Vanity Fair. After a partnership with Mr. Carter to create fitness centers for W Hotels failed to pan out according to plan, Mr. Wright caught a break: A fitness client and surfing pal, the hedge fund manager Daniel S. Loeb, steered him to the development team at 15 Central Park West.

"Obviously in today's world, fitness facilities are probably the No. 1 amenity in new marketing sales," Mr. Zeckendorf said. "We were his first facility, and I'm very proud of how far he's gone since we first lined up with him in 2005. I just think he's the best."

So he rehired him twice, and counting.

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