

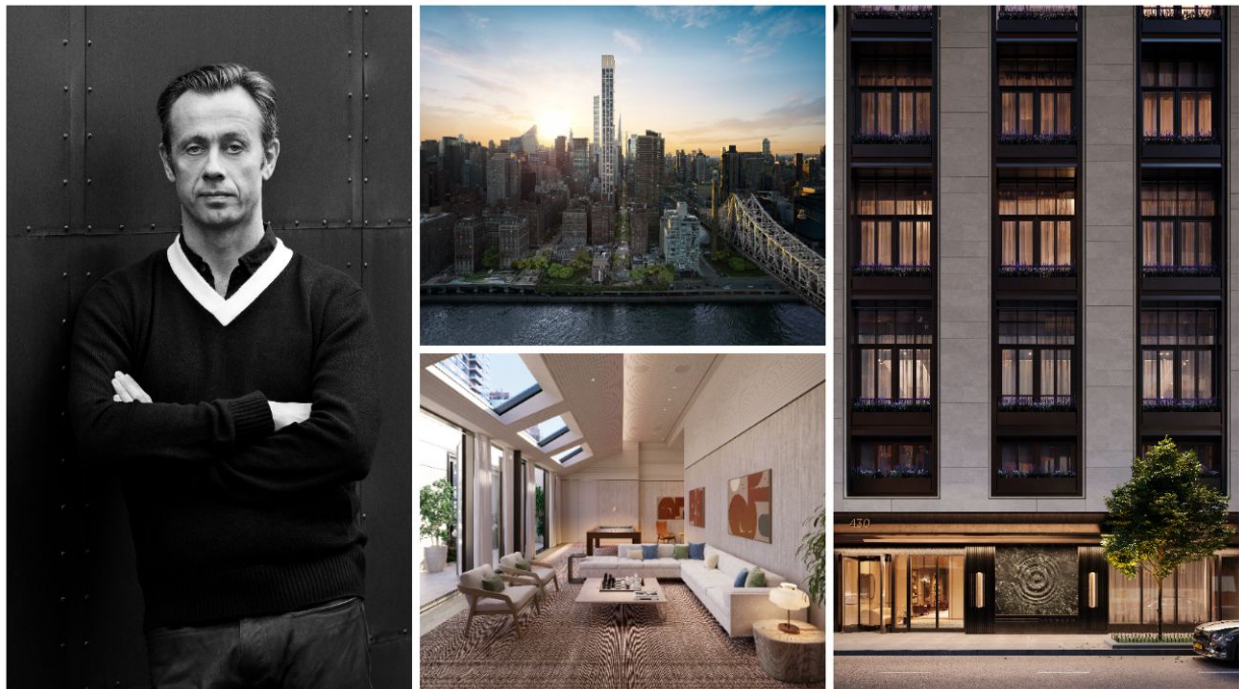
MANSION GLOBAL

THE INSIDERS

‘Nobody Goes to Rome, Looks at the Travertine and Says: This Is so 200 B.C.’

Architect Thomas Juul-Hansen on bucking trends in favor of timelessness and sense of place

BY REBECCA BRATBURD | ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON NOVEMBER 28, 2022 | [MANSION GLOBAL](#)



Originally from Denmark, architect Thomas Juul-Hansen has designed some of [New York City](#)'s inspiring luxury landmarks.

His signature approach to architecture and interior design can be seen throughout the city, including 96+Broadway, where he led the exterior and interior design. The new collection of 131 condos on the Upper West Side start at \$1.3 million. Sutton Tower, the 848-foot limestone building with 121 units in Manhattan's ritzy Sutton Place enclave, will commence sales this fall with prices expected to range from \$2.5 million to more than \$18 million. A One57 penthouse designed by Mr. Juul-Hansen on West 57th Street, or Billionaire's Row, recently sold for [\\$39.8 million](#).

Mr. Juul-Hansen's eponymous full-service design firm will celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2023, and he said timelessness remains his objective.

“We rely on natural materials that have been tested through time to help us carry an expression of design that ideally leans toward timelessness,” Mr. Juul-Hansen said. “That’s the goal, to make something that doesn’t date. I don’t want to make some super cool, trendy building that looks so interesting today, but the third time you see it, you ask, ‘Why? What’s the point of this?’”

Mansion Global caught up with Mr. Juul-Hansen to find out how he’s designing for global buyers, why he avoids trends and what he considers luxury.

Mansion Global: What’s your design philosophy, and does it change depending on where your projects are?

Thomas Juul-Hansen: My approach to design, to some extent, is global. I’m interested in things that function well. I’m interested in honesty in architecture, the use of materials and the expression coming from materials. I’m interested in making things that are quiet, uncluttered, serene and peaceful. That’s an overall design philosophy that can be applied anywhere on the planet, if one decides to do so.

MG: You’ve established a foothold in New York, and now you have projects in Miami, Los Angeles, London, Bangkok and more. How do you balance staying true to your aesthetic and allowing the vernacular to influence the design outcome?

TJH: When we work, whether it’s in Bangkok, London, Miami or Washington, D.C., the first thing I do is visit the site and spend some time there. Deciding what the DNA of a specific site is what a lot of it is really about. Some architects have a preconceived answer to architecture. Whether they build in Frankfurt or Los Angeles, the architecture is the same. I always found that a little bit strange, or at least that’s not how I approach design. It’s important to understand where you build and respect the location and your neighborhood. It’s more important than anything else. As designers and architects, we have a civic duty to the inhabitants of the city to respect the city you live in instead of making a monument to yourself, as some architects love to do.

MG: How does the local character apply to your projects in New York?

TJH: Even within Manhattan, which from a territorial standpoint, is a small portion of New York City, there are so many different villages within the city. The Upper East Side is a totally different city from the Upper West Side. The Financial District is a totally different city from the Lower East Side. The High Line [park] is a different place. Each of these villages has their own DNA. If one pays attention, you can come up with architectural solutions that are vastly different even within the little island of Manhattan. That’s something we try to approach and include in the designs that we do.

MG: Have you noticed any ways your work is evolving alongside shifting demands made by your clients? In other words, are you following any trends?

TJH: The answer to that is definitely no. First of all, we would go to great extremes to avoid trends for the simple reason that trends, by default, have a very limited lifespan. The last thing

that I want is for anything that I work on to have a limited lifespan. The opposite of trendiness is timelessness. ... Remember in the 1990s, in the dot-com boom, a lot of stuff had this temporary, plastic aesthetic to it. They barely managed to close construction before it looked dated. I remember looking at that and thinking it was my nightmare. My nightmare is that I invest my time and my blood and my heart and my soul into something and then it gets torn up two years later.

MG: When working on a project, how do you ensure you're working toward timelessness?

TJH: What we do is much more simple. We work with natural materials. We work with wood, stone and materials that have proven themselves over time to not date. Nobody looks at wood and says, "This is so dated." Nobody goes to Rome, looks at the travertine and says, "This is so 200 B.C." We use travertine all the time.

MG: What is your personal definition of luxury?

TJH: If I had to boil it down, luxury is about space and light. If you have a two-bedroom apartment that is 800 square feet and the windows are small and the ceiling is low, I don't care how much you spend on the wall finishes. You could put gold and diamonds everywhere and for me, it will never feel luxurious. On the flip side, if you have a 2,500 square foot, two-bedroom apartment with 16-foot ceilings and enormous, oversized windows with great natural light and so on, I would argue that even if the walls are white and the floors are simple wood, that could feel like luxury. Light is the key to luxury more than anything else.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.