

Luxury Upgrades of the **RICH & FAMOUS**

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As an ardent purveyor of luxury properties, I occasionally catch a glimpse of the lifestyles of the rich and famous. When money is no object, how do the super wealthy decorate? How to their tastes in design differ from us lesser mortals in a budget? Here are a three of my observations: ►



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CLASSICAL ELEMENTS & EUROPEA

Firstly, there is nothing random or mismatched in their homes. The uber-wealthy do not decorate like you and I, with an Ikea catalogue, sales flyers and a mishmash of hand-me-downs. Instead, the fortunate few with fathomless pocketbooks, enlist the talent of stylists to create deliberate, meticulous, historical stage sets. Typically, the rich emulate the rich and borrow from aristocracy for their inspiration. Whenever I am lucky enough to peek into a multi-million dollar home, I generally find owners eschew modernism, choosing instead to create thematic masterpieces with old-world charm. I see Tuscan Villas, English Manors, French Chateaux, and mini palaces of Versailles. Classical elements and traditional European motifs prevail.

For example, I recently showed an affluent client six of the finest condominium residences in Toronto, ranging from \$3,000,000 to over \$5,000,000 and the preference for classical themes was immediately evident. Three of these gorgeous suites were perfect recreations of 18th century European estate homes. We saw grand salons with Corinthian columns, wedding-cake Regency ceiling moldings, fancy hand-carved Italian marble hearths, and decorative Palladian arches. We wandered through rooms filled with Abuson tapestries, mahogany secretaires, Austrian crystal chandeliers, Louis XV chairs, Biedermier side tables, silk canopy beds, antique glazed cabinets and English porcelain commodes. It was easy to imagine a fine-tailored butler serving high-tea in the baronial, oak-paneled library. This quest for thematic perfection extended into the terrace and balcony with statuary, water fountains, gargoyles, and faux vineyard murals. Wealth identifies with wealth, their preferences transcend time. Nobles Oblige. Birds of a feather flock together in designing opulent gilded nests inspired by the past.

ASTONISHING COLLECTIBLES

My second observation is that the rich are rarely minimalists. Simply stated, they have more stuff. When I inspect upper-tier homes, I am astonished by their collections: art, antiques,



► memorabilia, rare books, crystal, china, clothes, shoes, and jewelry. I see wondrous things! A magical display of porcelain dolls dressed in finest velvets and silks, a world-class collection of sparkling Lalique glass, and a gadget that automatically winds the owners extensive array of fine gold watches. Galleries and wall niches greet visitors with carefully displayed objet d'art.

A while ago, I helped a developer market a new 5-star building on the lake, The Waterford, where most suites were in excess of \$1,000,000. Additional storage space was a top priority upgrade for these affluent buyers. Purchasers spent thousands organizing huge walk-in closets, complete with islands, dressing tables, extra lighting, humidifiers for the preservation of leather, cedar-linings for furs, retail display racks for shoes and purses, and built-in wall safes for special treasures. Vintage wine is the favorite collectible among the rich, so that purchasers routinely spent significant portion of their decorating budget on creating amazing, walk-in, temperature-controlled, 2000-bottle wine cellars with tasting tables and the sanctity of a religious chapel. The cost? About \$10-\$50K, contents not included. It is expensive to be rich!

LIBIDINOUS SPA BATHS

Themes and collections are important to the rich, but the quintessential upgrade I see these days is the luxury Master Retreat with a sitting area, fitness centre and above all, a showcase spa bathroom.

Without exception, bathrooms in million dollar homes and condos are marble-clad, multi-nozzled, steam-infused, libidinous palaces of pleasure. Sinks are passé. The mega-rich opt instead for above-counter "washing vessels". At a Coldwell Banker Elite Retreat in the U.S, where we toured homes in the \$5M-\$40M range, I saw a bathroom that was beyond awesome, probably worth more than my entire condo. It featured a hand-hewn copper washing vessel, gold-plated taps, atop a translucent onyx counter, with under-mounted revolving mood-lighting to romanticize the mundane rituals of nightly ablutions. The shower was party-size, complete with marble seat, hand-painted mosaic glass tiles, twin rain-showers, a niche for your cocktail glasses, and 60 individual body jets, much like a car-wash for humans. And do not forget Muffy. Cleanliness is next to Godliness even for rich dogs. The same house had a miniature pet spa, complete with ground-level shower, professional grooming table, a built-in hairdryer and multiple crystal water bowls for Evian, no doubt.

It used to be, the three design imperatives for luxury home buyers were stainless steel appliances, granite counters, and hardwood floors. Ultra-luxury home buyers, however, have raised the bar. Their benchmarks for luxury include classical themes, king-sized storage and display spaces for collectibles, and sumptuous master suites with a spa baths. Alas, for those of us on budgets, we can but dream.

Today Ikea, tomorrow Tuscany! ■