

# DOWNTOWN

## THE REAL NEW YORK: GRADE NEW YORK

JACKIE HART × FEBRUARY 8, 2016

**GRADE New York** is a full service architecture and interior design firm led by Thomas Hickey and Edward Yedid specializing in curating personalized, luxurious spaces and uniquely articulated lifestyle experiences. Between Hickey, Yedid and their team, GRADE has tackled many projects all around New York City, including downtown projects such as 52 Wooster, 87 Leonard and a new project on West 21st Street in Chelsea. While keeping busy in lower Manhattan, GRADE has also tackled projects in the Hamptons with developer Jay Bialsky; a trio of estates in Sagaponack that was listed earlier this year for \$60 mill+. In addition, they also re-designed Oprah's former penthouse at Place57, transforming the space into a high-tech Jetsons-esque residence where television screens pop out from panels behind artwork.

I was able to conduct some Q&A with Hickey and Yedid about their design aesthetic, projects and living in lower Manhattan and learn more about their respective professions.



Thomas Hickey and Edward Yedid of GRADE New York

*How did you two get your start in the industry and eventually end up partnering with one another to form GRADE?*

*Thomas:* My experience has varied greatly from designing luxury boutiques for Donna Karan both domestically and internationally and also to my time as a project architect at Robert A. M. Stern Architects. I met Edward in 2002 while teaching at Parson's School of Design. His perspective and design solutions were consistently aligned with mine which led us to joining forces and later partnering up.

*Edward:* Before GRADE, I worked with interior designer, Noel Jeffrey and was involved with designing Kips Bay Show House and Southampton Show House. It was during my time there when I was exposed to high-quality, luxury design.

*How would you define what "great design" is? What distinguishes great design from just good design?*

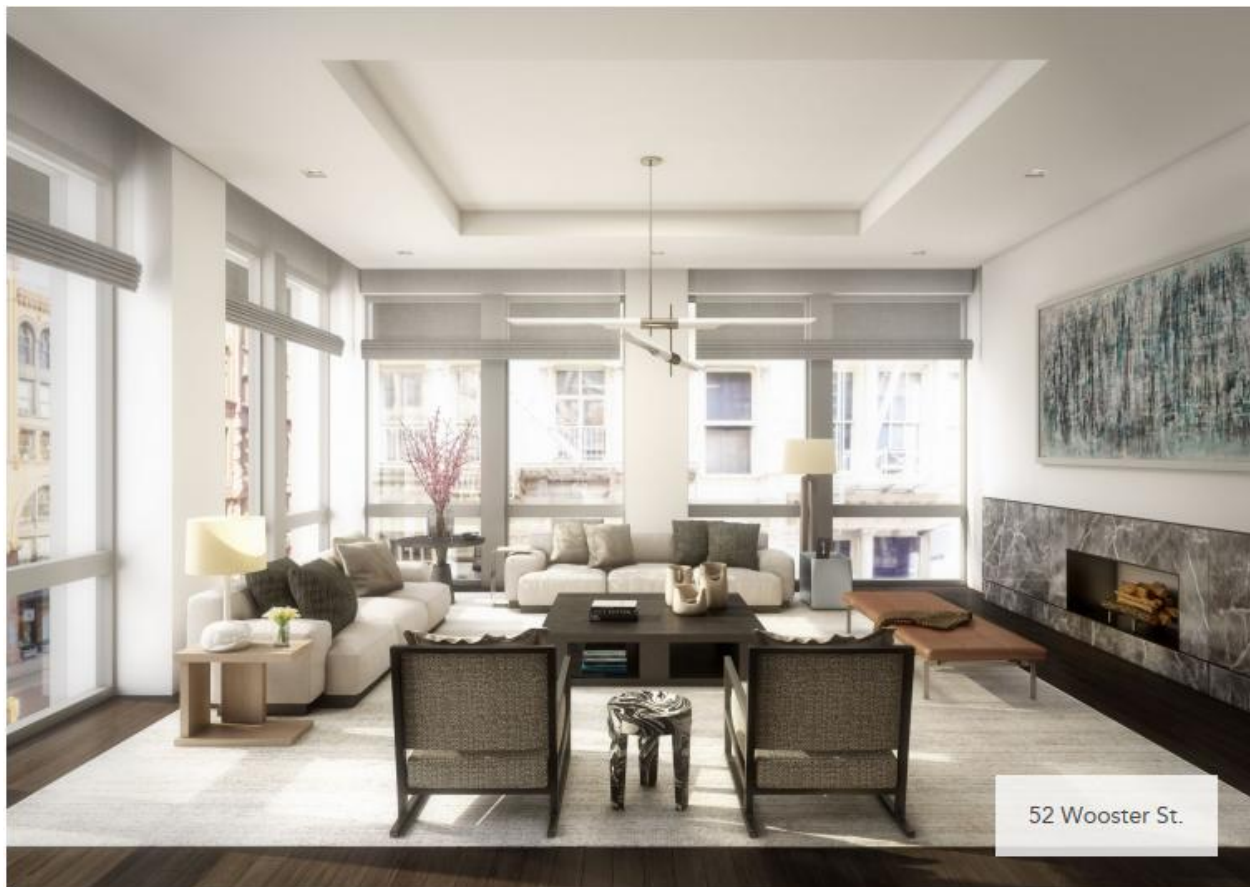
Good design solves the problem. A great design creates pause...makes you stop to admire what you are seeing, feeling and experiencing. Great design is high in quality, timeless and seamless. Much more than just aesthetic, it's about curating a solution that exceeds expectations.

*Does GRADE have a specific design aesthetic/clientele? Is there anything you think that sets your firm apart from others?*

Our aesthetic is tailored, calm and highly detailed and attracts clients that are looking for those qualities in their projects. Our design stands apart from others because we incorporate a holistic approach, spearheading both the architecture and the interior design at once. This allows our clients to anticipate what the finished project is going to look like. They know the details, they see the patterns, and they see the way the architecture is going to integrate with the decoration and vice versa.

*How does working on projects in lower Manhattan compare to other projects you have done around the city and in other locations around the world?*

All of our projects are specific to the client and their lifestyle, while respecting the context of the structure within its surroundings. There's a certain energy that goes into our downtown projects that would not be appropriate for our residential projects in the Upper East Side or the Hamptons. Projects in lower Manhattan have a certain excitement and vibrancy while maintaining a level of sophistication one expects from a world-class neighborhood. One aspect that's cohesive throughout our portfolio regardless of location is that we approach each project with a New York attitude that anything can be done.



*I'm familiar with one of your projects currently under construction, 52 Wooster. How would you describe your work on this project so far? How did you come to the decision to use the materials that you did for the design?*

We took the likes of the European buyer in mind while designing this project, incorporating high quality materials such as Italian marble slabs, stained Eucalyptus and high-gloss lacquers. We also wanted to create an experience that allows residents to feel like they are bathing in their own private, urban garden, so we were careful to consider the windows as an opportunity celebrate the flow of natural light radiating into the master bathroom as well as expand the space inside.

*Lower Manhattan has seen sort of resurgence in regards to real estate and luxury homes. What do you think draws people to downtown?*

Having lived in the far West Village, I appreciate the scale of neighborhoods and the familiarity it provides for the residents. Whether it's the connection with neighbors or its surroundings, there is a bond you have both physically and ephemerally. That kind of vibe is unique to downtown living.

*Do you have a project to-date that you're most proud of?*

There is a moment of pride with all of our projects. However, that wears off as we focus on the next project. We are proudest with the ongoing project of maintaining our studio and creating a consistent body of work that retains the highest qualities.

*Are there any projects that you will be tackling during the new year that you can share at this time?*

We're working on a condo on West 21<sup>st</sup> Street in Chelsea where we've designed a modern building with open-floor plans coupled with pockets of rooms for family living. We incorporated the qualities of materials like limestone, bronze and wood to provide a clean, rich feeling both in the interior and the exterior. The design of the facade is an extrusion and translation of the lines from the neighboring Neo-classic building. The final project will result in six full-floor units, two duplex penthouses and one townhouse unit.



*What would you say is the most challenging part of your job?*

The most challenging part of our job is managing expectations. Everyone wants everything all the time.

*What advice would you give to people looking to get into this kind of field? Do you think there are any common misconceptions people have about architects/designers?*

Architecture and interior design have to be your passion. This is not a field where you can work 9-5 and be fulfilled. It takes 40 hours a week to create an average design...you have to be willing to put your time in to create something special. The rewards are unlike any other field. What other profession creates physical manifestations of creative ideas that dictate one's life experiences?

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