



740 Park: The Story of the World's Richest Apartment Building

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For seventy-five years, it's been Manhattan's richest apartment building, and one of the most lusted-after addresses in the world. One apartment had 37 rooms, 14 bathrooms, 43 closets, 11 working fireplaces, a private elevator, and his-and-hers saunas; another at one time had a live-in service staff of 16. To this day, it is steeped in the purest luxury, the kind most of us could only imagine, until now.

The last great building to go up along New York's Gold Coast, construction on 740 Park finished in 1930. Since then, 740 has been home to an ever-evolving cadre of our wealthiest and most powerful families, some of America's (and the world's) oldest money—the kind attached to names like Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, Bouvier, Chrysler, Niarchos, Houghton, and Harkness—and some whose names evoke the excesses of today's monied elite: Kravis, Koch, Bronfman, Perelman, Steinberg, and Schwarzman. All along, the building has housed titans of industry, political power brokers, international royalty, fabulous scam-artists, and even the lowest scoundrels.

The book begins with the tumultuous story of the building's construction. Conceived in the bubbling financial, artistic, and social cauldron of 1920's Manhattan, 740 Park rose to its dizzying heights as the stock market plunged in 1929—the building was in dire financial straits before the first apartments were sold. The builders include the architectural genius Rosario Candela, the scheming businessman James T. Lee (Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis's grandfather), and a raft of financiers, many of whom were little more than white-collar crooks and grand-scale hustlers.

Once finished, 740 became a magnet for the richest, oldest families in the country: the Brewsters, descendents of the leader of the Plymouth Colony; the socially-registered Bordens, Hoppins, Scovilles, Thornes, and Schermerhorns; and top executives of the Chase Bank, American Express, and U.S. Rubber. Outside the walls of 740 Park, these were the people shaping America culturally and economically. Within those walls, they were indulging in all of the Seven Deadly Sins.

As the social climate evolved throughout the last century, so did 740 Park: after World War II, the building's rulers eased their more restrictive policies and began allowing Jews (though not to this day African Americans) to reside within their hallowed walls. Nowadays, it is full to bursting with new money, people whose fortunes, though freshly-made, are large enough to buy their way in.

At its core this book is a social history of the American rich, and how the locus of power and influence has shifted haltingly from old bloodlines to new money. But it's also much more than that: filled with meaty, startling, often tragic stories of the people who lived behind 740's walls, the book gives us an unprecedented access to worlds of wealth, privilege, and extraordinary folly that are usually hidden behind a scrim of money and influence. This is, truly, how the other half—or at least the other one hundredth of one percent—lives.

740 Park: The Story of the World's Richest Apartment Building Details

Date : Published (first published 2005)

ISBN :

Author : Michael Gross

Format : Kindle Edition 576 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, New York, Architecture

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From Reader Review 740 Park: The Story of the World's Richest Apartment Building for online ebook

Phil says

A little too much detail about the people who lived there. I would have liked more about the architecture, interior design, etc.

EvaSaidIt says

A wonderful real estate read, with historical bits about some of NYC's most illustrious names. great for real estate buffs and NYC historical enthusiasts, but a very slow pace and cumbersome/tenuous ties weigh it down. Too many extraneous social details about names modern New Yorkers would never know take more space than the names we do know. Worth the read for the more exciting parts, but perhaps a good one to put down and pick up again as you read something else concurrently.

Anastasia Lambert says

I couldn't finish it in the space of my loan! It was incredibly detailed. Perhaps too detailed. This book was a mammoth! I loved reading about the building and the people, to an extent. But I couldn't handle such crushing minutiae concerning generations of Old and New Money, with every connection in between.

Carey says

Thought this would be a work on wealth and American society but it is basically just a gossipy look at rich people with no reflection or thought.

Jeroen Kraan says

Didn't manage to finish this. I don't know what I expected, but this is just an interminable amount of pages about some society people you've never heard of who lived in a certain building. Might be an interesting book if you happen to be particularly interested in New York high society since the great depression, but I couldn't get through it.

Sandra says

Well-known writer (*NY Times*, *New York*, *Town & Country*, etc.) Michael Gross gives us an in-depth introduction (as far as is possible without most tenants direct input of the residents of 740 Park Avenue),

Steven Candela's most coveted creation. The sub-title, is "The Story of the World's Richest Apartment Building." From the history of the building to some of the current residents (most recently divulged in a PBS airing of *Independent Lens*) Mr. Gross chronicles the eccentricities, intrigues, exclusivity, and foibles of 740's denizens.

Mildly interesting, but at times, truly TMI, at times I was bored stiff with the pettiness, sordid affairs, and truly bad (even despicable) behavior of the very rich. The PBS production (*Park Avenue: Money, Power and the American Dream*) is by far superior for imparting information on what is transpiring now with the residents of 740 Park Avenue, and the average American at the other end of that avenue.

Ann says

Why did I keep reading?

The premise is that those people are worth caring about.

My response to that premise? Show me!

The premise wasn't proven.

Jack says

High society trash meets New York City real-estate porn.

New Yorkers LOVE real estate - getting it, having it, talking about it, always dreaming of bigger and better. This book is absolute catnip for this breed, of which I freely if abashedly admit to being a member.

740 Park is one of NYC's most legendary buildings, enormous mansions in the sky, vast flats with huge public rooms populated by the richest social barons of the day.

Michael Gross has done exhaustive research into the building's (ahem) storied history - who owned which unit, for how long, the deaths and divorces which caused sales and feuds, the famous families and the celebrity rejections from this most exclusive of apartment houses. For decades the building overtly shunned Jews, and then reluctantly admitted a few, to avoid charges of anti-Semitism. (Needless to say, no Russian Jews need apply.)

No movie people either - Streisand is but one of many who tried and failed to pass its rigid, pompous board.

Alas, there are no photographs of any of these extraordinary apartments, originally designed by the master Rosario Candela, many of them decorated (and later renovated) by the most lavish artisans of the day. The only illustrations are the abbreviated floorplans on the flyleaf at the front and back of the book, which give a tantalizing glimpse at the sprawling layouts.

There are moments when Gross leaves off the familial gossip and iterates the extraordinary staff needed to manage these fantastical spreads - the servants and butlers and cooks and chauffeurs working behind the scenes.

Fascinating for those who are drawn into the sometime sordid detail of the rich and mostly determinedly not-famous. But oh, how I wanted to see images of these pleasure palaces!

Mark says

I note with all honesty that I couldn't finish this, but it was as much my fault as the author's. Too many other things going on, and this was just too damned big for a book about one building and its denizens. There were some really interesting old money stories from New York society in the couple hundred pages I read, but the descriptive material about the interiors was often tedious and I didn't have the stamina to keep going. I think I had to be more of a Manhattanophile.

Sue Lipton says

(I admit to skimming some once I passed the halfway point.) This book is about the emergence of NYC in the early 20th Century and the interrelatedness of its Power Families; Old Money vs. New Money but always Money; architecture, decor, and excess; many names and stories seen through the lens of one iconic building.

Beth Anne says

Somehow I finished this, though I took a long break from it to read bicycle diaries. It reads like a Vanity Fair article, but without the photographs, which is probably why it was not riveting. The author writes for Vanity Fair, so hey, that part makes sense. There were some interesting characters in the book, but you never get to spend all that much time with them, because we are busy moving to another apartment. Overall, I rate it "Meh."

Sheila Woofter says

I'm sure this might be interesting to some people, but I had to stop. Too many names, who married who, in families I don't know, but should know because of how rich they are. Just not interested.

Michele Weiner says

There were some very interesting characters who lived at this address, and so many connections one to another, especially in the early years when apartments were rented only to those who were socially acceptable as well as wealthy. The building was designed by the Italian architect, Rosario Candela, already known for luxury NYC apartments. It was built by James Thomas Aloysius Lee and his partners. Lee was an adventurous land developer now probably most famous as Jacqueline Kennedy's grandfather, known to Caroline as Grampy Lee. The building did not make Lee a profit, and apartments were relatively stable in price until the 1980's and '90's when the new robber barons began to replace the old society folks. Originally conceived by Lee as a cooperative that would form a club of extraordinary gentlemen who shared the same values, Lee had to settle for renting. Tenants included John D. Rockefeller, Junior, the Brewsters, Landon Thorne and other successful NYC businessmen, many self-made, European royalty, mostly of the minor

variety, Jack Bouvier and his wife Janet and daughters Jacqueline and Lee among other less famous names. At one point, Junior Rockefeller bought the building and mercifully rescued Lee from the albatross of debt it represented. After the severe business decline of the late '60's and '70's, the renters finally agreed, under duress, to form a coop and assume the debt as a group. From then on, a board of directors decided which applicants were acceptable. From early days, a few Jewish apartments were designated, and it has only been recently that the informal quota has disappeared.

I enjoyed the author's description of the life of the wealthy in NYC; the richest build homes at first, starting downtown and moving uptown along Park and Fifth Avenues as the years passed. But slowly, private homes were replaced by high rise buildings so that by the '30's, everyone who was anyone was looking for a Candela apartment in one of the best buildings. 740 Park was the best, but for some of the most traditional newly made men, the least pretentious of the meritocracy, Park Avenue was a "Jewish address," so one half of the building fronted 71st Street, and the more staid preferred that address, as well as the less ostentatious entry. The building was divided into four sections, A, B, C, and D-lines, so named because each had its own bank of elevators. There were servants' rooms in many of the apartments, and extra rooms for help downstairs. Each apartment had its own storage room for cigars, wine and extra furniture. There was an enormous amount of remodeling, combining and recombining of apartments over the years. Many tenants and/or owners never occupied the rooms. Many others kept empty apartments after the death of parents who lived there as investments. Some who bought and redecorated lived there for only months or a few years before moving again. There were deaths, scandals, tragedies. Many of the owners ended up broke; some crashed and burned others went to jail. Many tenants were widows living alone, but there were also young families with children. Often the children hated the building. Employees robbed the tenants blind.

I liked the social history very much, but I would say that the author gave so many familial and business connections that one's head spun.

Catherine at The Gilmore Guide to Books says

After 3 1/2 weeks of stopping and starting I have finally polished through 740 Park. Sometimes, even when dishing on the lives of the wealthy there is TMI and Gross passed that point at page 100. Not with salacious, gossipy details but with minutia that becomes mind-numbing. This book is over 500 pages and it is 500 pages of small print, densely packed onto the page. I would have hoped in a book about opulence there would be some opulence but instead there are only 3 or 4 black and white photos. No eye candy or real estate porn at all. Disappointing and not one of Gross' better NYC books.

Cynthia says

I was so hoping this was going to be a big, juicy gossip fest like Mr. Gross' previous book Model. Unfortunately, you have to wade through over 100 pages of muck and detail (which some will find enlightening) on how this apartment building came to be built. I am really sorry but I just don't care. Finally, the gossip about the tenants comes and it is only in bursts and spits intermingled with more information on the finances of this building. I would give it a lesser rating but there is some fun gossip. I have to begrudgingly give Mr. Gross some credit because I know now the name of the president of the Chase Bank during the Depression and their attorneys.
