

## ‘The Man With A Plan’

Chicago’s business architect talks about designing for the city’s most desirable market: the filthy rich

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He’s currently involved with, count ‘em, seven of the most high profile and luxurious buildings in the city, yet architect Lucien Lagrange insists he’s not a busy guy. Never mind that he started the week of our interview in Bar Harbor, Maine. Two days later, he flew to Atlanta, then Milan, then Marseille, where he and his interior design wife, Jessica, spent of couple of days in his family home. He then took the TGV to Paris for a business meeting and flew back to Chicago for less than a day before flying to New York. To wrap up the whirlwind tour, Lagrange, 67, made his last stop in Montreal, where he was honored at his alma mater, McGill University.

The French-born architect studied in Montreal before embarking for Chicago, the city that made him most excited about the future of modern architecture. The year as 1978. He remembers walking down Dearborn, looking up at the Monadnock Building, the Federal Center, the Inland Steel Building, the Picasso. “I saw all the modern architecture; it was right there on the street,” he says. “It was an incredible world.”



These days, Lagrange is carving out his own place in Chicago’s history – and skyline. He transformed the Carbide and Carbon Building into the Hard Rock Hotel, and his 67-story Park Tower sits across from the city’s historic water tower of 1869. He’s working on a project in Milan, and he’s hoping to start on in Paris – a dream of his for years. At the other end of the spectrum, Lagrange applies as much care to small-scale projects like designing the plywood cubicles in his own office building. But it’s not until he starts tallying the number of units he presently overseeing (by memory!) that it’s clear his definition of “busy” is slightly warped. Lincoln Park 2520: 306 units and 12 townhomes. The new residential portion of the Ritz-Carlton: 86 units. The Elysian: 60 condos and 182 hotel rooms. 10 East Delaware: 121 residences. The Blackstone: 332 hotel units. 208 South LaSalle: 620 hotel rooms.

All this in a real estate market notorious for being anything by booming (try slow, stalled, oversaturated, for starters). “There’s a lot of talk about it, because my projects are doing well,” says Lagrange, who things architecture, sadly, has become something of a fashion statement. The go-to guy for classically inspired high-end residential buildings, he scoffs at the idea of design as a fad. Instead, his 23-year old firm – and its staff of 60 “very talented architects” – takes a pragmatic and lifestyle focuses approach. Space, proportion and order are hallmarks of his work. Of course, that doesn’t mean his buildings aren’t pretty (exhibit A: 65 East Goethe with its stone façade, mansard roof and zinc). It just means there’s as much emphasis on living in them as looking at them.

Scuttling around his office, pointing out books (he brings them home by the suitcase from every trip) in the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves

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that envelop him – Paul Friese, Nathan Glazer, Adolph Loos – Lagrange hauls out an enormous tome from Paris, flipping to the source of inspiration for his new Lincoln Park project: an image of an 18th century chateau that once belonged to Madame de Pompadour and is considered one of the most beautiful gardens in France. With three acres to use, he wants every single unit of in the classically inspired building to have a view of a formal French garden.

“In housing, you’re dealing with the social structure. It’s how we live,” says Lagrange, who’s most heavily influenced by Louis Sullivan (he lives in an original Sullivan in Lincoln Park) and August Perret. “I believe there should be some order to what we do. How am I going to walk from room to room to room? We want to live in a space that feels good.”

For Lagrange, who’s often dubbed “the city’s architect to the wealthy,” that means understanding the luxurious lifestyle of the people he’s designing for. Rooms are designed in proportion to art collections. Closets make way for vast wardrobes, and might even include a jewelry safe or refrigerated fur storage. If residents are entertainers, Lagrange thinks about serving sit-down dinners for 80-plus people and the demand that places on a kitchen. Enormous countertops, warming ovens and wine cellars are just the beginning. What about a chilled marble counter for rolling pastries, an airtight silver storage cabinet, a walk-in freezer or butler’s pantry? He might even add a room for florists and chefs, and a separate entrances (with separate elevators) for staff and guests.

It makes sense that one of his latest endeavors is garnering attention for its innovative lifestyle experience. X/O, designed for what Lagrange calls a younger crowd, is a sprawling South Loop

development including two towers (“bending as if dancing in the sky”), 10 townhomes, a spa, a fitness center and a park. “From his incredible break-through design down to the layouts of each unit, he’s been hands-on,” says X/O developer Brian Giles. “For a guy of that stature, it’s pretty remarkable.”