

Adam Gordon and Steven Harris build for themselves, and it sells

Working together, the developer and the architect have created a string of unique buildings around town



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Architect Steven Harris (left) and developer Adam Gordon.

After his son was born in 1999, stylish self-storage magnate Adam Gordon decided to dump his Soho loft for a proper home on the Upper East Side. He saw dozens of townhouses, none worked.

"There were three astonishing homes, each with a subtle point of view," Gordon recalls. "All turned out to be designed by Steven Harris."

For going on two decades, Harris had been creating some of the most refined private residences in town. But Gordon didn't pull out his checkbook. He pulled out his appointment book and scheduled a meeting with Harris.

It was the beginning of not only a beautiful friendship but a development partnership that has brought the bespoke and boutique to the city's tired townhouses, with a few condos to boot.

Their work together, through a dozen projects over the past decade, is culminating with their first ground-up development, a nine-unit condo development at 560 W. 24th St. that is quiet and dignified by Chelsea's cacophonous standards.

"We shared an admiration for great things that are the best of their sort — even if no one else sees it right away," Harris says. "That's why we're here today, doing things neither of us ever thought we would do."

It all started with that first townhouse, on E. 80th St., which Harris designed as a quiet refuge behind a peaked limestone facade and wrought-iron doors. A zen-like garden out back included a working fireplace.

Gordon loved the place so much that he ended up selling it and hiring Harris to build him another one. The resulting property, at 92 Jane St., won numerous awards for its uncanny mix of historical facade and details with an unusually modern glass box on the back — now a widely imitated trick.

Gordon liked that one so much that he sold, too — and hired Harris to recast a Beaux Arts mansion on the Upper West Side. Again, he flipped it, picking up another place in the Village.

Harris had spent two decades intentionally avoiding developers. "For me, the architectural process is a narrative, finding the stories in the lives of the people who will call these spaces home and turning that into architecture," he says.

By the time Gordon had hired him for the third home, Harris started to feel like he was being used. But he also didn't mind.

"In the end, it was fine, because the work was so good, we just kept at it," Harris says.

Gordon insists that he wasn't trying to dupe his architect into becoming his business partner. "Honestly, each of those houses were for me, but once we were done, they were so good, I knew we could do better," Gordon says. "So we just kept at it."

In all, they have done eight homes together. Each is utterly unique yet undeniably their own.

"Most architects have their standard three or four gestures they deploy every time," Gordon says. "Not Steven. Every project is different, and buyers can feel it when they walk in. I felt it the first time I walked into one of his homes."

As the pair grew more comfortable with their process, they branched out into bigger projects, though still all renovations. There was the transformation of Bouwerie Lane Theater, a rundown cast-iron damsel at the corner of Bond St., and stolid lofts across the way, 41 Bond.



The condo building at 560 W. 24th St. in West Chelsea as it will look on completion.

Both were instrumental in the cobblestone byway becoming one of the most fabulous addresses in town. "So many developers talk about esthetics, but are really talking about money," says star Douglas Elliman broker Leonard Steinberg, who has worked on three of their projects. "Not these two. They mean every word of it. It's all about passion. The money is secondary."

It may sound hokey, even disingenuous. But to watch Gordon and Harris debate a project, something as simple as the proportions of a bathtub, is to witness the rare marriage of passion, execution and esthetic genius.

Take one of Harris' ironclad rules: "If you're doing a living room, it should be between 18 and 19 feet, so there's room for the sofa and a lamp to read by. It shouldn't be 25 feet, certainly not for the sake of being 25 feet."

More than architect and builder, they are tailor and mechanic, crafting exacting spaces that fit just right, but concentrating just as much on what's going on under the hood.

At 560 W. 24th St., it starts on the outside, where the hand-cut limestone facade features a rosetta frame within the windows, which Gordon calls "the lingerie — it's just peeking out at you, ever so subtly."

The moldings are different sizes, but just barely, in each room, and at slightly different heights.

"Most people wouldn't notice it, but this all changes the perception of a space," Harris says. "It unfolds over time. We want people to keep discovering things a month, two months, two years into living here. It's about creating a narrative for life."

That narrative is turning out to be a best seller.

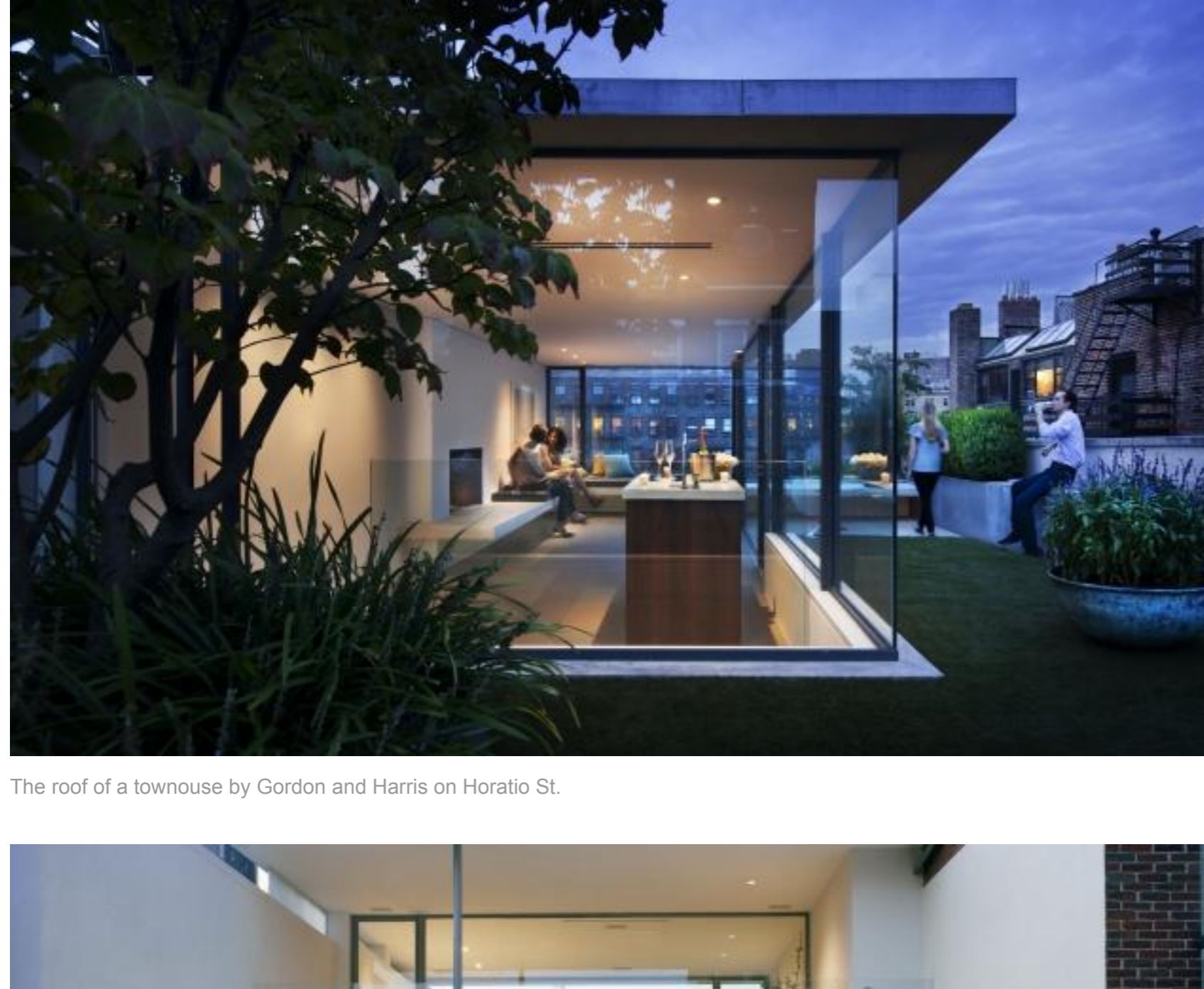
Of their townhouses, most sold for eight figures, all for two to three times what Gordon originally paid — not counting construction costs.

Of the nine units at 560 W. 24th St., asking between \$7.25 million and \$18.5 million, one is already in contract, with interest in about half the others. This after only three weeks of sales.

"They're building for themselves, and nobody else," Steinberg says, "and it turns out that's exactly what everybody else wants."



Gordon and Harris' 54 Bond St. condos in NoHo.



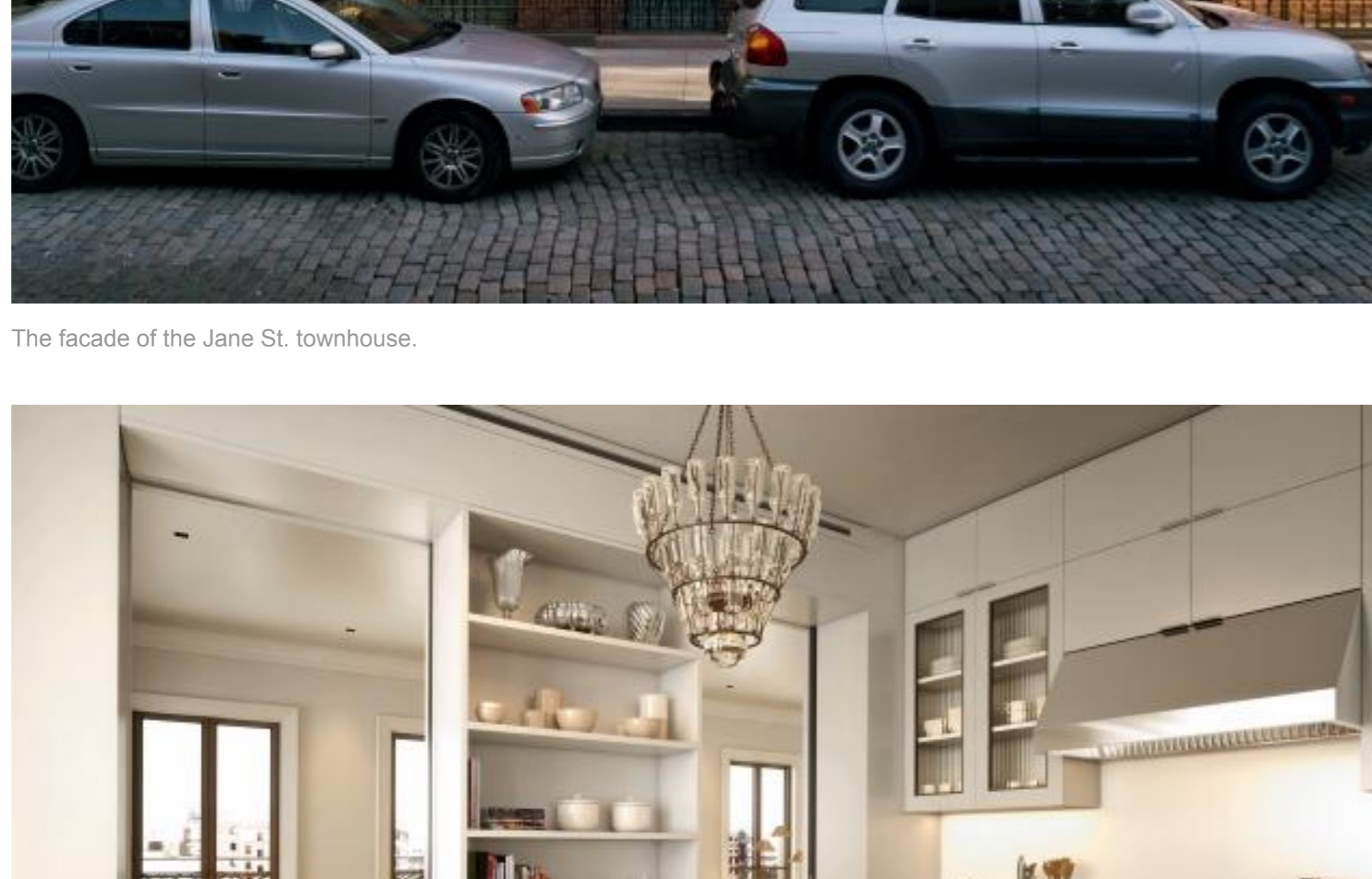
The roof of a townhouse by Gordon and Harris on Horatio St.



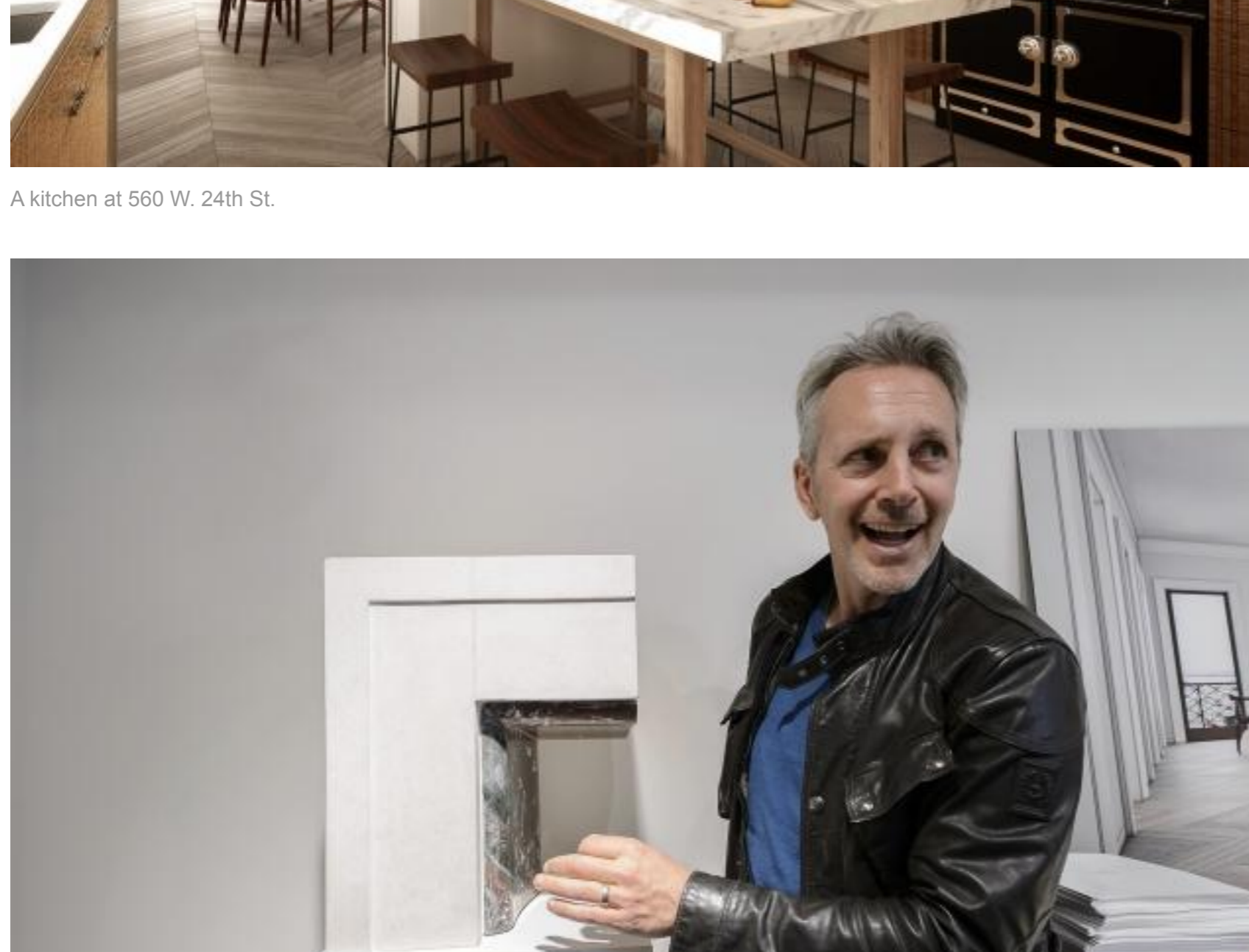
The innovative townhouse at 92 Jane St., originally meant as a home for Gordon's family.



The facade of the Jane St. townhouse.



A kitchen at 560 W. 24th St.



Adam Gordon points out design details of the building at 560 W. 24th St.

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