

## More Flexible Live/Work Lofts

Users, rather than planners, are determining how certain buildings are being used in Portland's Pearl District.

AS AGING BABY BOOMERS SWELL THE MOVEMENT from suburban, single-family detached houses back to more urbane condominiums near the heart of American cities, developers face several unfamiliar problems. While developers usually seek street-level retail for urban projects, few independent small retailers can survive the gravitation of shoppers toward more powerful suburban big-box retail chains, and the big boxes have needs that make them unsuitable for urban condominium

developments. Street-level housing is difficult to incorporate into urban projects because public street exposure is often undesirable for residential use. Higher-visibility office space, such as that for service-oriented insurance and real estate offices, fits well but is in shorter demand at the same time that the supply of new downtown residential condominiums is burgeoning.

Now, with the 136-unit Metropolitan condominiums, Hoyt Street Properties, the largest developer of urban condominiums in Portland's trendy Pearl District, is experimenting with a variety of solutions that may help define in more detail the amorphous term *live/work condominiums* and assist in filling the retailer and service/office tenant gap. At the current northern edge of the Pearl District, there is relatively low demand for additional small retail tenants, and no proven office market. But demand for condominiums with panoramic views has increased measurably.

To help solve the conundrum at its Pearl District site, Portland-based Hoyt Street Properties president Tiffany Sweitzer, one of very few young female developers, decided to depart from tradition and hold an invitational design competition. The winning firm was BOORA Architects, a large Portland firm most noted for designing

**The southeast tower, an eight-story wing, and a four-story live/work building flank an open courtyard that acts as an extension of the full-block park to its north. The shorter buildings maintain a 100-foot height limit for the northern half of the block so as not to shade the new park.**



**The 19-story Metropolitan tower, the tallest structure in Portland's Pearl District, sits on only a quarter block.**

performing arts centers around the country.

Even though the site constituted a full block, one of Portland's noted small 200-foot-square blocks, John Meadows, BOORA's partner-in-charge, challenged the conventional wisdom of building larger-floor-plate, low- or mid-rise structures around internal courtyards. He was sensitive to the historic Portland tradition of building on 100-foot-square, quarter-block sites. Accommodating the demand for larger units, BOORA designed a 19-story tower—at 225 feet, the tallest structure in the Pearl District—for the southeast quadrant of the block. The corner tower, scheduled to be completed this year, will provide unencumbered views of downtown to the south, the Willamette River to the east, and the Portland West Hills, including the 5,000-acre Forest Park designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and his stepson John Charles Olmsted.

In addition to the panoramic views, the tower, with a 9,300-square-foot footprint, will allow all



four units on seven floors to be desirable corner units; of the 136 units, 88 are corner units, accounting for 65 percent of the complex. This small-floor-plate tower scheme creates highly marketable units that the developer can sell at premium prices. On the ninth and tenth floors, there are six units ranging in size from 1,209 to 1,846 square feet and priced from \$584,000 to \$995,000—about \$500 per square foot. From the 11th to the 17th floors, there are four corner units per floor ranging from 1,626 to 1,846 square feet and priced from \$895,000 to \$1.14 million—about \$620 per square foot. On the 18th and 19th floors, there are only two penthouses per floor, ranging from 3,007 to 3,344 square feet and priced from \$2.85 million to \$3.05 million—almost \$950 per square foot. Under the entire block are two full levels of underground parking providing 212 parking spaces for the 136 units—a 1.6-to-1 parking ratio—planned as one space per bedroom.

Location of the tower on the southeast corner allows the project to maintain the 100-foot height limit for the northern half of the block so as not to shade the new, full-block Tanner Springs Park to the north.

BOORA designed two more buildings alongside an open courtyard that acts as an extension of the park into the condominium project.

One, an eight-story building, contains units ranging from 853 to 1,846 square feet and priced from \$367,000 to \$892,000.

Many of the units are townhouses, and several are designed as ground-floor live/work units with flexible space and a bathroom at street level, but with a second floor containing a living, dining, and kitchen area, plus a bedroom, second bathroom, and laundry room. Hoyt Street Properties built similar units in the Streetcar Lofts one block to the west and found buyers who valued a quasi-retail/office space on the ground level. Now this pattern of ground-floor workspace and second-floor living area is becoming more common in the Pearl District.

Opposite the Streetcar Lofts project, however, the developer and architect designed a different kind of live/work unit in a four-story building. The ground floor contains 17,100 square feet of retail space designed for a larger destination retailer attracted by the location at the point where the popular streetcar line turns west on its way from South Waterfront and Portland State University to an upscale retail district. Above the retailer are 15 live/work lofts with modest kitchens and bathrooms, ranging from 825 to 1,375 square feet and priced at \$359,000 to \$650,000. The developer says many of these units may be purchased as office space rather than as combined live/work units. More

properly they might be termed “live or work” units, designed for maximal flexibility and according to business occupancy codes to encourage diversity of uses while broadening the developer’s market and price points.

Adding to the mix of facilities is a two-bedroom, two-bathroom guest house that opens onto a second-floor roof terrace. This facility, coupled with a conference room, wine storage room, club room, and fitness center, accommodates a wide variety of both communal and private group activities. For example, a buyer of a live or work unit could use the conference room for business functions, while a family could reserve the guest house for family reunions—a special need for the exploding number of aging baby boomers and their echo boomer children.

In a sense, the new willingness on the part of Hoyt Street Properties to experiment with this kind of flexibility brings the Pearl District closer to its roots. The original buildings built there a century ago, before sectors, were extraordinarily flexible, with tall ceilings and large bays, and have been used as warehouses, factories, stores, galleries, restaurants, offices, and residential lofts. In a sense, the detour of planners over the past century into promotion of single-use zones is coming to an end with the advent of widely divergent mixed-use sectors in which progressive architects and developers are permitted the freedom to return to a time when buildings were more flexible and lifestyles more urbane. In this more diverse environment, the users, rather than the planners, determine how buildings are to be used, and buildings are allowed to change with different occupants and different times. **U**

**WILLIAM P. MACHT** is a professor of urban planning and development at Portland State University in Oregon and a development consultant. (Comments about projects profiled in this column, as well as proposals for future profiles, should be directed to the author at [willmacht@gorge.net](mailto:willmacht@gorge.net).)



The units can be configured for living space (above) or workspace (left).