

At Home . . . with Hotel Amenities

Design elements that made their way into a select group of A-list hotels are showing up in American luxury condominium projects.

CONDOMINIUM DESIGN HAS undergone major changes over the last decade, responding to the evolving expectations of potential buyers. Buyer demand for luxury, sophistication, and technological convenience is being reflected in modern condominium design.

The impetus, no doubt, started with some urban dwellers buying or renting in an upscale property that included the amenities of a luxury

and airport pickup and dropoff to homeowners as well as hotel guests.

Some of those same amenities that drove people to buy in a shared condo/hotel property are showing up in condominium developments minus the hotel. Today's condominium design is a refreshing alternative to the cookie-cutter condos of ten years ago, says Jon Moss, senior vice president of Development for Prometheus Real Estate Group, Inc., in San Mateo, California.

The Mercer mixed-use condominium development in downtown Walnut Creek, California, in the East Bay outside San Francisco, for example, includes 181 luxury condominiums located over 21,000 square feet (1,951 sq m) of retail space on the ground floor and underground parking. Plans for the five floors range from an 893-square-foot (83-sq-m), one-bedroom, 1.5-bathroom unit, to a 1,714-square-foot (159-sq-m), three-bedroom, 2.5-bathroom unit. Prices start at \$525,000 for a one-bedroom unit and \$1.3 million for a three-bedroom unit.

With design and personalized service becoming major factors in homeowners' buying decisions,

the Mercer's concierge services will mirror those of a hotel. The staff will make reservations for dinner and entertainment, golf tee times, airport car service, and prearranged dry-cleaning pickup/dropoff; and will be there to welcome guests from early in the morning to late at night.

Like hotels, residences are lifestyle destinations—particularly urban residential projects such as

the Mercer, says Colum McCartan, founder and principal of McCartan, a San Francisco and New York design firm. "The lobby features a palatial three-story grand entrance, not the typical walk-through space that takes you from the front door to the elevator. Our goal is to provide the residences with a more traditional entrance, giving them a sense of individuality and evoking a warm feeling of 'home.'"

Common areas include the lobby, a fitness center, and a spa for socializing, relaxing, and conducting business. "Homebuyers have told us they are much more likely to reach their fitness goals if the state-of-the-art gym is only an elevator away, and they can finish with a soak in the spa," says Moss.

The Mercer also has a large central courtyard with an outdoor fireplace and a barbecue area, as well as a space for indoor community entertaining so that residents can host a dinner party with a chef-quality kitchen, a large-screen TV, and a baby grand piano.

Technology has also had a significant impact on hybrid hotel/condo design. "Technology is really changing the way we're looking at things," says Moss. "Most everyone wants computer facilities right in the home. With new technology, homebuyers can have flat screen TVs that only take wall space and don't require a huge armoire cabinet. The Mercer also offers fiber-optic Internet connections, and a prewired home network system."

Condos at the Mercer include high-end finishes, hardwood floors, stainless-steel refrigerators and dish washers, Italian-designed plumbing fixtures, granite throughout the kitchen, and separate shower stalls and deep soaking tubs in the bathrooms, as well as bay windows that flood the interior with natural light.



The Mercer mixed-use development in downtown Walnut Creek, California, includes 181 luxury condominiums located over retail space. The concierge services will mirror those of a hotel, and the project will have a fitness center, a spa, a large central courtyard, a space for indoor community entertaining, and fiber-optic Internet connections.

hotel. The Ritz-Carlton, the Four Seasons, and other high-end hotels have extended their brands and reputations to include shared arrangements with condominiums stacked in the same building or tied together via adjacent lobbies. New York, Boston, Miami, Washington, D.C., south Florida, and San Francisco are all home to new condo/hotel combinations that offer concierge services