

Interior of Lacey condo unit with sliding door "walls" on the left side Photo courtesy of Division 1 Architects.
Exterior of The Lacey on 11th Street and Florida Ave, NW. Photo courtesy of Division 1 Architects.



Carving out Space *Squeezing the most space out of Wow-Factor Condos*

BY MARK F. JOHNSON



Bonstra/Haresign Architects are designing a 38 unit condo on the corner of 14th and R Streets, NW scheduled to open summer, 2011

You might be struck by how stunning they are at first glance. But, while they may be long on looks, pretty soon you realize there's not much upstairs.....or downstairs as the case may be.

Today's higher-end urban apartments and condominiums are usually packed with goodies like view-fulfilling floor-to-ceiling windows, concrete or granite countertops, exposed ductwork and de rigueur stainless steel appliances. But they are not

so endowed when it comes to size, certainly not in the way they were 40 to 50 years ago.

Back then, a one bedroom apartment would have run roughly 1,000 square feet while today's buildings on average yield about three-fourths that amount for a similar unit. Condominiums tend to come bigger than rental apartments in newer buildings. Architects admit that apartments and condos today are generally less spacious than they were years ago. In fact, Bill Bonstra of DC-based Bonstra/Haresign Architects, a firm that has had its hand in the design of many residential units in the area, said that it is those floor-to-ceiling windows and "all that glass that actually make the units look bigger than they are"

"Today land is more expensive than it was in the past," said Ali Reza Honarkar, an architect with a firm called Division 1. Developers don't want to build units with a lot of "wasted space" he remarked. "They want to create the largest number of units they can."

Bonstra added that not only are units kept smaller because of the increased cost of land, but also because construction costs have skyrocketed. But costs, say those who



RIGHT: Exterior of the planned Drost at 10th and W Streets, NW, a 4 unit condo scheduled for summer, 2011



design these buildings, aren't the only reason that units come in a smaller size these days. Both architects agree that changes in the way we live today combine with construction and land costs to bring down the size of apartments.

Taking in the View

I recently toured two new residential buildings to take a look at what they offered. One, View 14, is a larger construction located on 14th Street, NW at the corner of Florida Avenue. The other is the now nearly sold-out Lacey, a condo down the street from View 14 at the corner of Florida Avenue and 11th Street, right next door to the Florida Avenue Grill. In fact, the Lacey is named for the Grill's founder. Honarkar is the architect who designed the Lacey as well as Logan Heights a block away on 10th Street. Incidentally, his firm also did the design work for nearby restaurant Local 16. Further downtown, Division 1 takes credit for nightclubs Lima, Eighteenth Street Lounge and Dragonfly.

The nine-story View 14, with cascading balconies that offer some great views of the capital city's skyline from its Columbia Heights perch, was built as a condo but was converted to a rental building because of the economic downturn. The apartment units range from studios (460 to 525 sq. ft) to two bedroom/two bath duplexes (1206-1692 sq ft). In between are one bedrooms/one bath, (589 to 821 sq ft), one bedroom/den/office (822 to 973 sq ft), two bedroom/two bath Jr's (862 to 957 sq ft) and full two bedroom/two baths (1035-1442 sq feet).

"When we changed from a condo to a rental, the apartments were redesigned," said David Franco, a View 14 developer. "Some of the larger [corner and duplex] units were down-sized," he acknowledged. According to him, had View 14 remained a condo, it would have had larger units than most of the competition. Franco downsized about 12% of the units he said, because the condo market is completely different from the rental market. "Condo purchasers are looking for larger units than most renters." Franco believes that many people in the DC

area are willing to spend \$600,000 to \$800,000 for a 2 bedroom/den unit because they are "at home" and they don't want to feel as if they have to be shoe-horned into their home. "The market for a \$4,000 to \$5,000 per month rental unit is much smaller," he went on. "Most developers won't carve out too big a unit for a small pool of people."

Give Me My Space

What developers of today's residential units do concern themselves with is efficient use of space. Most renters at View 14 for example, are single. It is likely that most apartment renters citywide are single. How space is apportioned is par-

unique in the open space creation in that we offer sliding door rooms that allow for more openness when you need it and more controlled space when that is what you prefer," the architect stated. The 4-level building has 26 units ranging in size from studios to two-bedrooms/two bath duplexes. The studio size is about 480 sq ft, a one-bedroom unit yields about another 20 sq ft and 2 bedrooms range in size from 1450 sq ft to 1600 sq ft. There seem to be few walls in any of these units. They are nothing like the very dedicated spaces that you see in older buildings where the kitchen was always a defined space as was the living room as well as the dining room if one existed.

Open area interior of 9th floor View 14 duplex looking downtown.
Middle of Pic: The exterior of View 14 looking north at 14th and Florida Avenue, NW.
Photos by Mark F. Johnson



ticularly important in smaller units. Most developers agree that renters as well as buyers want an open floor plan in their living, dining and kitchen area. "People like the flexibility this provides when they entertain," said Franco. View 14 has provided more closet space and even adds a linen closet in every unit. "This is important to renters," he pointed out. Honarkar agreed with that assessment. "To get the most out of your building in terms of units you have to be more efficient."

The Lacey's Frills

The Lacey provides lots of open space in all units. "We're sort of

Today's Spaces Reflect Modern Life

"We don't live in grand mansions anymore, said Bonstra. "More people are living in condos or apartments today." Bonstra, a partner at his Connecticut Avenue firm, said people don't want a lot of walls because they prefer a more open feeling. "Kitchens have moved into the living room." Bonstra has a lot to say about the rise of the kitchen in modern architectural design. "Kitchens have become front and center in today's lifestyle." The architect, who has designed such condos as Que 14 at the corner of Q and 14th in Logan Circle, added

that he has seen examples of kitchens that don't get used for a year or so. People like them to look good when they entertain, he told me. The reason kitchens can keep that like-new appearance for so long, these architects say, is because many of the residents eat microwaveable food or they simply eat out.

One of the chief reasons to move to an area like the U Street corridor, Logan Circle or Chinatown, Honarkar commented, is because there is so much to do and so many places to go to shop and eat out and most of the buyers or renters in these areas take full advantage of the opportunities.

More Modernism in DC's Future

Both Bonstra and Honarkar are working on future condo projects in Logan Circle and

Shaw respectively. Bonstra's project is planned for the southwest corner of 14th and R Streets, NW where a Zip car lot now stands. The building, as currently planned, will feature 38 units ranging in size from studios to penthouses, at least one of which is to be a duplex. The building is currently slated to go into construction this spring, with a projected delivery by the summer of 2011. "We're envisioning units sized for different interests," he said. "We want to provide something for everybody in this building."

In keeping with the moniker theme they started with the Lacey, the Division 1 project that Honarkar is working on for the corner of 10th and W Streets, NW, is to be called the Drost, in honor of one of the architect's professors while a student at the University of Maryland. "He is known for designing out of the box and that's what our firm has tried to do with both the Lacey and this new project." They hope to start work on the Drost this summer with delivery expected about 14 months later.

Honarkar said that the units are designed to be a little bit bigger in the new project. "This will be a 4 unit building and will include larger flats and duplexes for those who want more space and don't mind paying more for size." ★