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Contemporary Condos

L.A.'s vertical neighborhoods now offer green and high-design elements

BY CHAD CLARK

BY NOW EVERYONE HAS NOTICED THE RESULTS of the residential building boom in L.A. It seems like large scale residential buildings were and are going up left and right. Are there enough people to occupy all of these apartments and condominiums? That's hard to say, but what it means is that there are currently some really amazing residences on the market. These new urban multiunit residences offer a plethora of amenities and affordable prices when compared to the typical single-family detached residence in L.A. The city's plan was to increase density along public transportation routes, which means that a large portion of these new residences can help ease the nightmare that is L.A. traffic. They also create opportunities for people to live closer to where they work. That might be reason enough for a lot of people, but for the others there are

plenty of reasons to go condo.

Condos certainly aren't new to L.A. In the 1980s a strip of Wilshire Boulevard became known as the "Corridor" because of the numerous condominium towers being constructed along each side. These super stylish (for the '80s anyway) condo towers were a dramatic departure from those of the '60s and '70s and redefined condo living for L.A.

Recently a demand for a new type of living has been created by Angelenos. We are tired of commuting and being stuck in traffic for hours on end. We want to live and work in actual neighborhoods that are combined with urban centers. Condo living in L.A. is becoming increasingly popular not only because it is often the most affordable option, but also attractive simply because of its simplicity. Sometimes lack of responsibil-

ity equals piece of mind and many condos offer not only that but hotel-like amenities. There is no yard to mow, no fences to paint, and you can travel for months without having to worry about leaving your home unoccupied. Having services such as dry-cleaning, housekeeping, concierge, not to mention gyms, spas, and social spaces incorporated into your home meets the demand of today's urbanites.

The future of urban living in Los Angeles has arrived and now our neighborhoods are vertical. Many of these new urban homes are in high-tech high-rise buildings that offer sweeping views, large windows, and high ceilings. Some are in ornate historical buildings with great architectural features. Some offer sustainable designs using environmentally friendly materials and construction methods. In fact, there is something for just about everyone from architecture buffs to the most demanding technophile.

One of these new cosmo condos is **Evo** (www.evo-south.com/index.htm), currently under construction downtown. Slated to open this fall, **Evo** and the **South Collection** are collectively considered L.A.'s first new sustainable high-rise community. Located a few blocks from the Staples Center, the buildings offer a wide array of environmentally friendly features as well as building-wide energy savings. In fact **Evo**, is rated LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, green building rating system) silver and two other buildings (**Luma** and **Elleven**) are rated as gold. They are the first and so far the only LEED gold-rated condos in Southern California. What that translates into is a residence that is energy efficient, nontoxic, and made of materials that do not harm the environment; a condo with a conscience so to speak. There are large operable windows for natural ventilation and day lighting, bamboo flooring, natural wool carpeting, and a specialized water system that uses rainwater and the buildings grey water (recycled waste water) to irrigate the landscaping. Residents are encouraged to recycle and educated on the green features of their homes. **Evo** and its sister buildings are an important part of the city's new plan for sustainability and lower carbon emissions.

Just down the street is **717 Olympic** (www.717olympic.com) a 26-story live/work luxury residential high rise. The building offers dramatic spaces with enormous window walls, solar shades, and wood and marble flooring. Personal services and amenities for folks on the go are key features of these residences. They even have an on-site event planner who will oversee a calendar of weekly brunches, wine tastings, and more. There is a 24/7 fitness club, valet parking, and valet dry cleaning, not to mention a dedicated concierge. On the eighth floor you will find the Orbit Lounge, which opens to a lavish rooftop terrace with fire pits, and secluded seating and spectacular views of downtown. Living at 717 Olympic certainly would take the edge off the daily stress of urban living. You can also check out 717's sister building **Viridian** coming soon to the Miracle Mile area (www.viridianla.com).

A few minutes from downtown (on the bus) in charming and up-and-coming Lincoln Heights you will find the **Daly Street Lofts** (2450 Daly St.) designed by noted architectural critic Joseph Giovannini. Almost more art than architecture, the project is an adaptive reuse of an existing industrial telephone-trucking

garage into live/work lofts. Undulating planes and dramatic light-drenched spaces define the character of the 14 individually unique units. The architect designed the spaces using Renaissance techniques such as forced perspective and axonometric projections to create spaces that are richly expressive and complex. If you are into architecture or just curious I highly recommend a visit, and who knows maybe you will fall in love with something completely different.

OK, so admittedly downtown and vicinity has a bit further to go before it becomes what some people would call a vibrant residential area. So for those with a little less of a pioneering spirit there are plenty of choices in areas that are already active urban centers.

Following close behind in the green scene is **9900 Wilshire** (www.9900wilshire.com), a soon to be 252-unit luxury condo high-rise designed by Richard Meier (the Getty Center) at the site of the soon to be closed Robinsons May in Beverly Hills. Expected to achieve LEED gold status, 9900 is comprised of lofts and townhouses with surrounding gardens designed by Laurie D. Olin & Associates (National Gallery Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C.). This is uber high-end living with environmental responsibility. Owners will use 25% less electricity and 50% less water than similarly sized homes in the area. Part landmark, part environmental statement, 9900 will become a leader in green development and chic luxury living.

Koreatown is certainly one of my favorite neighborhoods, if only for the restaurants. One new and notable building there is **Solair** (www.solairwilshire.com). This rather impressive 22-story contemporary structure boasts an international flair and lavish interior spaces also on Wilshire Boulevard. There are the usual luxury resort-style amenities: pools with private cabanas, private decks, a spa. But there are also some unique and thoughtful features as well, such as a resident herb garden, yoga room, and Metro station connection in the heart of an already thriving neighborhood. The building was also constructed with sustainability in mind with natural materials, eco-conscious finishes, and energy saving systems. There is an expansive sky deck for socializing and relaxing and an adjacent two-story retail area for shopping. This is a truly beautiful and thoughtfully designed building; it is warm and welcoming without overlooking a single desire any owner might have.

In West Hollywood on Fairfax the Pugh + Scarpa designed **Cherokee Lofts** are slated for completion sometime next year. The new eco-friendly condos will occupy the former site of Cherokee Recording Studios where David Bowie and Bob Dylan once recorded. Intended as live/work residences specifically for musicians, they will be reusing some of the original wood paneling from the studio and two units will feature dedicated, acoustically designed spaces for home recording. The Habitat Group is working on a condo development that will include a public park for the city of West Hollywood. **Formosa 1140** (www.loharchitects.com) is an 11-unit condo building designed by Lorcan O'Herlihy Architects that will be shifted to the north side of the lot to allow the Formosa Pocket Park to be created and fill a growing need for public green space in the city. You might remember O'Herlihy from his **Habitat 825** two-story condo, also in WeHo. The design blended the



lines between public and private spaces with a sleek contemporary wrapper. Penthouses in **Habitat 825** have fetched among the highest prices ever paid for condominiums in West Hollywood.

With locations scattered throughout the city, **The Metro Collection** (www.The-Metro-Collection.com) by John Laing Homes are residences designed for what they call the "creative class." Each of the numerous buildings all over the city has its own style. **Element** in Marina del Rey is a concrete and glass structure that allows for flexible and open interior spaces. Natural ventilation, wide-open space, and a lot of light let the owners define the space for themselves. **Indigo** in Playa Vista offers single-family detached and paired residences clustered around a park creating a village-esque social community, which encourages walking and open spaces which flow from outside to inside. **Madrone** in Hollywood creates a gateway to the Hollywood hills inspired by the old courtyard buildings of Hollywood. The building opens to the outside at Le Brea Avenue, which encourages pedestrian activity. The building also gives a little something back to the local community with an art display in the lush main courtyard. A loft-like feel in traditional units with floor-to-ceiling glazing lend views of the Hollywood hills and create an urban oasis close to the redline.

Even celebs have caught on to the condo craze. At **Sierra Towers** (www.sierratowersales.com) you can see the likes of Lindsay Lohan, Matthew Perry, or PJ Harvey sneaking out of this classic midcentury condo tower under the cover of night. No it's not new, but this swank pile of pads has been hot for years. No wonder with its sleek modern aesthetic, and million-dollar interior

makeovers; **Sierra Towers** certainly has a great deal of sex appeal. Situated in the western end of the Sunset Strip, the building has a long history; perhaps this is the place that started it all. Stories of who paid off who to get in to this place and a long list of eccentric and famous residents like George Hamilton have made this place a legend among condominium living.

For those of us who can't quite swing the price of a celebrity pre-owned or new starchitect-designed urban residence, there are affordable alternatives that don't skimp on style or amenities. **The Met Warner Center** (www.themetwc.com) in Woodland Hills offers surprisingly affordable urban living combined with the amenities of a spa retreat. Located in the Valley's urban core, the MetWC offers upscale living with features like a fitness studio, hot tub, large outdoor fireplaces, and four pools. Luxury interiors boast hardwood flooring, gourmet kitchens, cherry cabinets, granite countertops, and private patios and decks.

Not exactly luxury condos but certainly worthy of mentioning is **Triangle Square** in Hollywood. Triangle Square is the nation's very first affordable, multicultural housing development that supports the needs of our LGBT elders. The building is a 104-unit residential structure complete with parking and an activity center where 34% of the units will be designated for seniors with HIV/AIDS, homeless, or at risk of homelessness. There is a courtyard with a pool, and each floor has its own lounge. Triangle Square reminds us that, in a city full of luxury living, there are many who are in need and deserve a friendly, safe, and decent home regardless of income, age, race, or sexual orientation.