



Historic Opera Lofts music to buyers' ears

BY DAN SCHUYLER

Every so often, a project comes along that is truly in a category all its own. Such is the case with LOACQ's Opera Lofts, a 93-unit loft conversion at 2545 S. Dearborn St.

Built in stages from 1912 to 1924, the 370-foot multi-level building on the northern edge of Bronzeville served as a set design and storage facility for the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

The building is across from the brand-new South Loop Hotel and only blocks from McCormick Place, Mercy Hospital, U.S. Cellular Field and the highly anticipated 2016 Olympic Village.

When complete, it will house one- to three-bedroom units with one or two baths, as well as a number of penthouses. The units will range in size from 830 square feet to almost 3,000 square feet and will be priced from the \$260s. Deded indoor parking will be available at \$22,500.

Those numbers don't tell the full story of Opera Lofts, however. Its soul is found instead in its eclectic design and variety of sizes, shapes and materials.

Opera Lofts is really a conglomerate of six buildings constructed over two decades, according to Mike Jerabek, a partner of Worn Jerabek Architects, the firm that designed the project.

Asked who originally created Opera Lofts' edifices, Jerabek responds, simply: "a madman."

"Opera Lofts is really a four-dimensional design challenge. The height of the building

varies from spot to spot. Some sections have six floors while others have just two. Different materials were used to construct the various phases of the building. As a result, it is almost impossible to work exclusively with two-dimensional plans. You have to design the interior as you walk through it."

Although this is a daunting task for an architect, the end justifies the means, because each of the 93 units is unique in every aspect, from size, shape and elevation to floor plan, materials and décor.

"We've spent the last two years trying to make this vision come true," says co-developer Leigh Ballen. "It turns out that no one person knows all there is to know about this building. We knew it would make great loft space, and it has been an honor to be a part of it. But the challenges have been unique, to say the least."

Ballen says that because Opera Lofts is so awe-inspiring, he and his partners were committed to spare no expense in crafting the finest building of its type, with finishes that rival even those in big-name, high-profile projects like the Trump International Hotel and Tower.

Units have 13- to 30-foot ceiling heights, exposed columns, brick and ductwork, 13-foot window heights in living areas, large balconies, hardwood floors, in-wall safes and multimedia wiring.

Kitchen finishes include stainless-steel appliances, 42-inch maple cabinetry and granite countertops with a full height glass backsplash.

Master baths include marble countertops, sinks and full slab of marble on the floors and walls, whirlpool tubs and a dual flush toilet.

Some of the building amenities include a scenic rooftop with more than 7,000 square feet of green roof, two common decks with barbeque areas, a pet-friendly dog run, fitness center, twin high-speed elevators, and advanced safety systems including sprinklers, smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, and fire alarm system with central monitoring.

Opera Lofts is being developed in two "acts." Most units in Act One are complete and ready for immediate delivery. Act Two will be complete by the end of 2008.

Almost half of the units at Opera Lofts are sold, but a wide variety of homes are still available. The sales office, located at 2545 S. Dearborn St, is open from noon to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. **NH**

Opera Lofts

Near South Side

1 - 3 bedrooms

From the \$260s

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