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Going Condo Crazy

By Jennifer Garrett



Photo by Martha Busse

Madison is condo crazy. The prices and locations are all over the map. We have modern high-rises, suburban townhomes and even stand-alone ranches. There are options for first-time buyers, empty nesters and nearly everyone in between. So check out the charms of care-free living during the Madison Area Builders Association annual Parade of Condos, July 29 -- August 6.

Imagine no more lawns to mow and no more gutters to clean. Or maybe it's no more landlords to pay and no more money to toss away on rent. For a lot of people, condominiums make an awful lot of sense. No wonder thirty-four different condo projects are featured on the Parade this year. From the heart of downtown to the Lake Wisconsin waterfront, there are all kinds of condos at all kinds of prices with wildly different styles and floor plans suited to singles, couples, vacationers and more.

Snowbirds

Gary Steen and Art Bottinger probably wouldn't be living in Madison were it not for Metropolitan Place. Until two years ago, the two had only vacationed here in the last thirty years or so. Steen graduated from the UW in 1964, but hadn't made Madison home since then. The new downtown changed all that.

The men made their home in Cape Canaveral, Florida, where they had a four-thousand-square-foot riverfront estate. A few years ago the large house started becoming as much of a headache as a haven. "Florida summers were becoming too much," Bottinger says. "The big house was getting to be too much."

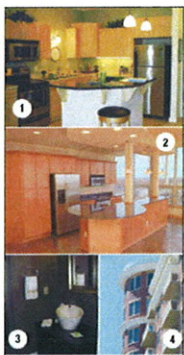
So the pair decided to split their time between Florida and someplace cooler in the summer. Interestingly it was Bottinger -- the non-Badger -- who suggested Madison. Both had always liked the city during their visits, but they were used to big cities and lifestyle communities in Florida. But when new condos and restaurants started cropping up downtown just as the art scene began to swell, Bottinger and Steen knew they had found their summer home. "The tipping point was Overture Center," Bottinger says.

They have been in their Metropolitan penthouse for two years and they have loved every minute of it. The two walk to State Street and the Capitol Square to dine, hear concerts and see plays. On football Saturdays they listen to the band warm up at the Kohl Center before heading over to Camp Randall. "It's an easy city to live in," Bottinger says.

Both Bottinger and Steen keep an eye on Madison's changing skyline over breakfast on their terrace. And when they are away, they simply lock the door and notify the building manager. It makes it easy to spend half of the year down south and countless other weeks traveling the world.

They've even begun to envision a future in which their Madison condo is their primary, if not only, home. "We'll probably end up here and rent down south for a couple of months," Steen says.

Steen and Bottinger's exotically decorated penthouse won't be open on the Parade of Condos, but Metropolitan Place will have a luxury two-bedroom, two-bath model open in the same building. Units in the Phase II building, which is currently under construction, are for sale with occupancy guaranteed for next summer.



1. City styling meets the suburbs in the Prairie Condominiums II Northridge in Wausauke
2. A kitchen with a view at the west side Weston Place
3. Paul and Florence DeLuca's condo at the splashy downtown Marina
4. Looking up at Metropolitan Place, which helped usher in the Madison condo era

Photo by Martha Busse

Empty Nesters

Florence and Paul DeLuca used to live on the far west side of town. They were happy there. It was close to the medical school where Paul worked. They loved their house and the tree-lined streets of their neighborhood. But Florence found herself daydreaming about living in the heart of the city.

"I got it in my head that I wanted to move downtown," says Florence.

So they did.

The DeLucas were some of the first people to move into the Marina, the metal-clad building facing John Nolen Drive and Lake Monona. Now Florence walks to Jacobson Bros. to buy meat. She walks to the library to borrow books. She and Paul can even walk to Overture Center to see plays at the Madison Repertory Theatre.

"I hate to drive and I love walking down here," she says. "No more looking for parking."

Downsizing, though, was a challenge. Although the DeLucas lost only four hundred square feet of living space, they had a full garage and basement that they used for storage. So they worked with interior designer Laurel McManus Brown, president of architecture and interior design firm Brownhouse, to pack their condominium with clever closets and other spaces for storing their belongings. The bedroom window ledges have deep built-in drawers. The laundry room hosts a wine cooler.

Shedding some old belongings allowed the DeLucas to buy some new furniture of a more appropriate scale and design for their new urban home. Florence even traveled to High Point, North Carolina, with Brown to make selections. "It's the furniture capital -- furniture Mecca -- of the world," Brown says. "There's over a million square feet of showroom."

The DeLucas are quickly adjusting to condo living. "At first I thought it was going to be strange, but now I love it," Florence says. "I guess we just like being a part of downtown. It's a fun place to be."

One of the Parade units at the Marina has more than seventeen hundred square feet of living space and lists for \$619,900.

Young Urbanite

Jane Borkowski, a twenty-seven-year-old data warehouse analyst, had been watching the condo market since she got her very first paycheck from her very first job. When the Alexander Company announced its plans for Capitol West -- a bold condominium development with a tower, townhomes, lofts and more -- Borkowski was intrigued.

She loved the location just off the square on the West Washington block that formerly housed the old Meriter hospital. She liked the environmentally friendly construction. Alexander Company maintained the shell of a former building to convert it into residential living spaces. The team also worked with the Madison Environmental Group to cut down on demolition and construction waste by recycling building materials from the structures previously on the site.

She also liked the price. One-bedroom units like hers start around \$160,000. Three-bedroom condos, though, are fetching more than \$800,000.

The one downside for Borkowski is the wait. She signed on to purchase her unit in the main tower last summer, and she won't move in until sometime next year. Until then she's counting down her last days as a renter. "I was looking. I've been studying the downtown market for years," she says, "but I'm a patient person."

Although the project is still under construction, Alexander Company's design studio at 145 Badger Road will be open during the Parade. The studio gives condo browsers a sneak peek at what's to come, plus it helps early buyers like Borkowski pick out appliances and finishes. Scale models are on-site to help visitors visualize the buildings, and over sixty floor plans are on hand for review.

Pedestrians and Pedalers

Downtown isn't the only spot for high-rise condos or for urban-style living. One of four Verdian condo projects on the Parade is Camery Square in Sun Prairie. The development puts row-style townhomes

Downsizing 101

For folks heading out of a house and into a condo, deciding what to keep and what to toss can be tough, but it can be done.



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