

Top Dollar City Digs

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By B.P.



In 1997, LR Development's Park Tower set a new standard for luxury housing in the city, and a new price point. Condos in the pencil-thin high-rise hovered around \$400 a square foot, with a starting price of \$600,000 for unfinished space.

At the time, prices at the Park Tower seemed to be pushing the envelope. Today, the top units at the highest priced new developments are selling for \$750 to more than \$1,000 a square foot, more than double Park Tower's original cost, and are averaging \$2 million to \$3 million. At LR Development's 840 N. Lake Shore Drive, the 8,830-square-foot penthouse is priced at \$8.9 million—for raw space—and the duplex penthouse on the 36th and 37th floors of the Palmolive Building is priced at \$10 million. What happened?

The massive jump in prices at this end of the market was no surprise to Christopher Carley, president of the Fordham Company, who says he saw the writing on the wall 10 years ago. "I really anticipated the baby boomers, some percentage of them, coming out of the suburbs and wanting comparable luxury housing downtown," says Carley, developer of the Fordham, the Pinnacle and 65 E. Goethe.

Carley's vision proved correct, and droves of empty nesters have been returning to the city, helping to push prices to new heights. LR Development appealed to those buyers at the Park Tower by opening the door to a new level of amenities and service. The condos sit atop a 19-story Park Hyatt Hotel, at 800 N. Michigan, and offer buyers everything from an indoor spa to room service and a gourmet restaurant.

Now, the Fordham Company has raised the bar yet again, according to Carley. "Our strategy was to provide a comprehensive lifestyle for very busy

people who are affluent and willing and able to pay for time," Carley says. "That's what they're buying through services."

Amenities and services at the Pinnacle include a private theater, a spa, an indoor swimming pool, a health club, maid service, auto service, a wine cellar with a tasting room and a humidor room. The developers of 1000 S. Michigan Avenue, a planned 40-story tower overlooking Grant Park, have included tennis and basketball practice areas, a health club, an indoor pool and a golf practice area with an 18-hole simulator. Premium developments now include things such as indoor dog runs, and "video walls" for teleconferencing as well as old standards such as 24-hour door staff and receiving rooms.

But large, luxurious spaces and the ability to thoroughly customize units, often with the help of the developer's design team, are still the greatest perks at the highest priced projects, buildings such as 65 E. Goethe, 840 N. Lake Shore Drive and the conversions of the Palmolive Building, the former Ambassador West Hotel and the former Blackstone Hotel. "At 840 (Lake Shore Drive) your range of customization is complete, and people do a wide variety of things," says Laura Molk, of LR Development. The company has a staff of 25 in-house architects who work with individual buyers to customize their space.

As builders have tried to one-up each other on amenities, services and customization, however, high-end architecture has remained relatively conservative.

French architect Lucien Lagrange is now the designer of choice for Chicago's wealthy, it seems, with credits including the Park Tower, 840 N. Lake Shore Drive, 65 E. Goethe, the Pinnacle



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and the Blackstone renovation among others.

The classic look of a metal mansard roof has become Lagrange's calling card at high-end buildings, along with bay windows, turrets, arched doorways and elegant balconies. The materials are always the best: mahogany, hand-forged iron, marble flooring, limestone cladding. The buildings might look more natural on a 19th century Parisian parkway than in 21st century Chicago, but Carley says, that's the sort of vintage look buyers at this price point prefer.