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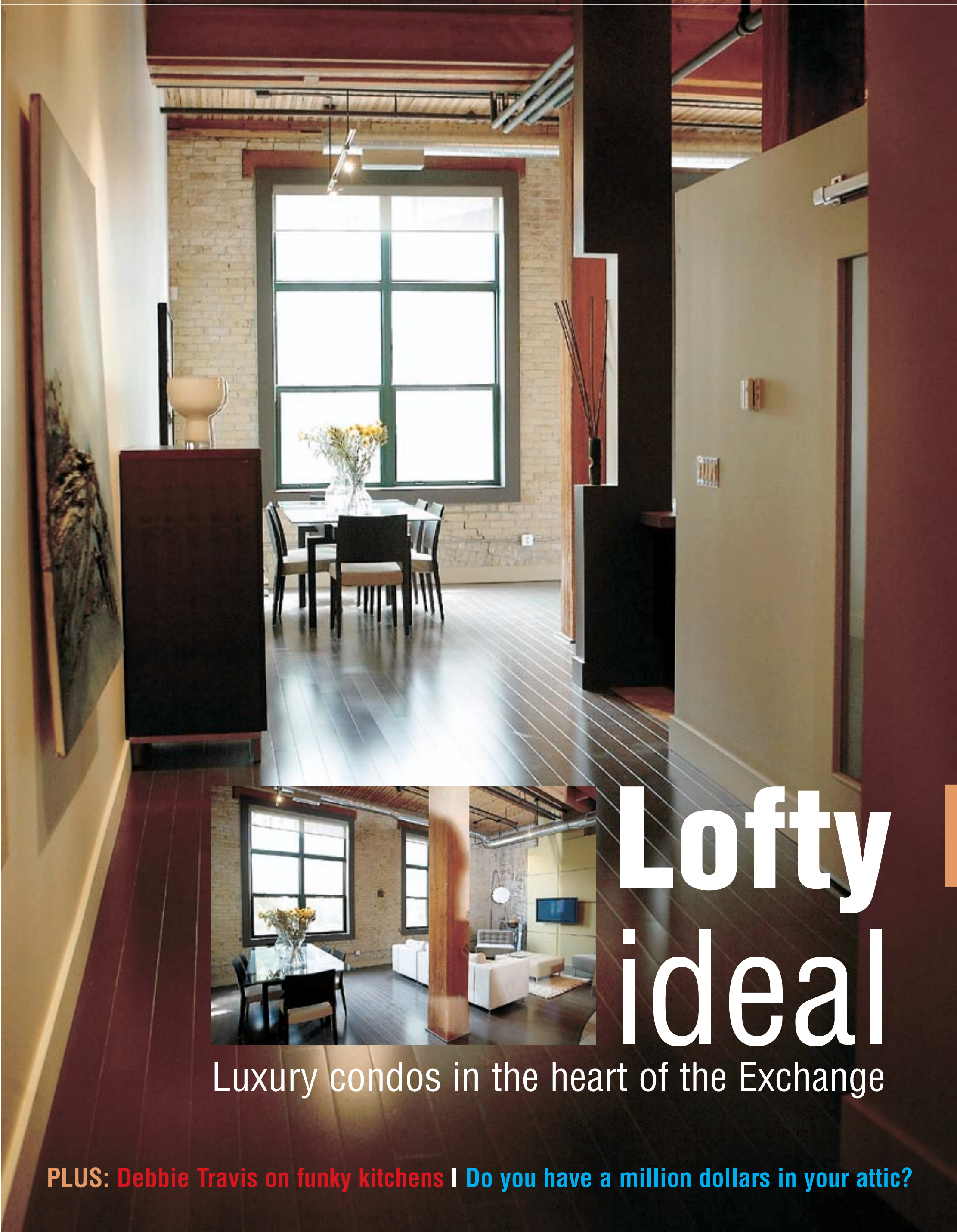
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Lofty ideal

Luxury condos in the heart of the Exchange

PLUS: Debbie Travis on funky kitchens | Do you have a million dollars in your attic?

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COVER STORY

Living in The Lofts

Former Kelly Building given new life as modern condo complex

By Jon Waldman

If you haven't seen the Kelly Building in awhile, you may want to take a look around the 101-year-old structure located at 181 Bannatyne Ave. Heck, you might want to even bring along your wardrobe, furniture and other personal items, because there's a good chance you'll want to take up residence there.

Over the last couple years, the Kelly Building has undergone a major renovation, becoming a condominium complex now known as The Lofts on Bannatyne. This 21-unit facility (20 condos that range from 1,450 to 1,813 square feet and one commercial section) mixes the retro fit of solid brick walls and Douglas Fir beams and posts with modern living amenities such as sliding doors and half walls that reach toward the 13- to 18-foot high ceilings.

Keeping the building's older elements intact was important to A & S Homes, the building's developers. "The key goal for us was getting the building to function, but maintaining the architecture that was originally there," said Vince Spezzano of A & S. "We've maintained all of the wood ceilings and all of the wood columns and all of the wood beams. We paid extra attention to the design of the units, to make sure that all of those architectural items would be left exposed, and that's part of what makes the unit so unique.

"There's other condos that are being done that are older buildings that are being retro-fitted into condominiums, but none of them have those features."

In 2001, a developer tried to convert the Kelly Building to condos but that project ended when a legal dispute with the neighbouring building caused expensive delays. Spezzano said this time, no outstanding legal issues remain.

Vintage look

Preserving the look of 181 Bannatyne was important not only to A & S, but to Winnipeg's planning, property and development department as well. While much of the exterior was not going to be altered, Spezzano notes that one aspect was renovated, but remained true to its original style.

"The structure itself, the brick and that sort of thing, we weren't changing that or doing anything of that nature to it. Because we were redoing all of the windows, we redid them in a fashion that reproduced the look of what the original windows were," Spezzano said. "So although they're modern materials (fibreglass), we maintained that colour and the style, the way the mutton bars are, the way that the windows are split in the same way that the windows were done originally, to keep that same look."

Each of the 20 condos, which range in price from \$225,000 to \$285,000, is equipped with two bedroom areas and two bathrooms. Additionally, there is a walk-in closet for the master bedroom, in-suite laundry and storage facilities and a large expanse for kitchen, living room and dining rooms. Other features include underground parking, a wheelchair lift, a main-floor seating area and security.

The Lofts is part of a major residential development in the East Exchange District, which, as RE/MAX realtor Bill Thiessen explains, is being converted to have the feel of a big city



urban community.

"You're now watching being built, as we speak, a village," Thiessen said. "In the pike coming up, we have at least a couple hundred units on the waterfront, and then we have the Ashdown Warehouse, which is another hundred units; so if you add it up along with some other projects, collectively, that's a lot, and you can see each other from each other's doorsteps."

"So what it becomes is it starts to feel like a village, which is about as good as it gets. When people watch a

show like *Sex and the City*, and you watch them in the villages in New York in those wonderful brownstones, those walk-ups, and they walk down to the corner, they have cappuccino, they go to the flower shop, and you always think, 'that's really cool.' We're not there yet, but we're starting to be that way."

Along with the district growing as a whole in the East Exchange, The Lofts community itself is a strong menagerie. While one may expect a growing urban community to be youth-centric, Thiessen notes that those who have purchased condos thus far are a diverse group.

"Back four or five years ago, if you had launched a project like this, you would have had mostly very young people, no matter what the price was. This has been really pleasant, because we've sold 50 per cent now in less than

a month that we've been marketing, and they've been a complete cross-section, which is the way it was supposed to (be)," he said. "We've got some people well into their 50s, empty-nesters, snowbirds, those kind of people, right to young singles, and we've sold to people in their 30s and 40s, so I think it's been a real good cross-section."

Different age groups

Not only are the occupants from different age groups but from different locations as well. Among those who have purchased condos so far are people from Portage la Prairie, Victoria, B.C. and Toronto. "We're getting lots of out-of-towners," Thiessen notes. "A bit of everything."

"A key to healthy downtowns is strong residential populations, and a residential population that's a mixed demographic, so that you get people of

all income levels, of different nationalities, of some different walks of life," adds CentreVenture Development Corporation general manager Diane Bampton. "So that's what makes for a vibrant neighbourhood."

The location itself is a big draw for The Lofts. Aside from the mix of restaurants and shopping in the area, the development is situated within walking distance of many entertainment venues.

"It's central to everything," Bampton said, "whether it's the towers at Portage and Main or the cultural district, the (Pantages) Playhouse, MTC, the (Centennial) Concert Hall. You're just footsteps away from Steven Juba Park and the emerging Waterfront Drive neighbourhood, so it's a fantastic urban location."

The Kelly Building has been brought back to life with urban, contemporary condos.

PHOTOS BY RUTH BONNEVILLE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

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