

Rebirth of an Exchange treasure

By: Staff Writer

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Sizes: five plans from 635 sq.ft. to 1,673 sq.ft.

Price: from \$149,900 to \$385,000 incl., net GST.

Contact: Bill Thiessen of RE/MAX Performance, 946-LOFT (5638).

By Gloria Taylor

WINNIPEGGERS have an opportunity to live in one of the Exchange District's signature heritage buildings thanks to the development of the Fairchild Lofts condominiums at 110 Princess St.

Built in 1906-07 for a farm implements' retail/wholesale company owned by Frank A. Fairchild, the Fairchild Building today has been listed as a heritage building by the City of Winnipeg for its distinctive mercantile style.

"(The building) serves as a magnificent example of the new approach to warehouse design that occurred across North America after the turn-of-the century," says a City of Winnipeg website.

The tribute refers in part to the structure's ornate exterior, but condo buyers who purchase one of the 50 developed units in the downtown building will also inherit many of the authentic features that characterize grand old buildings of the era: 11- to 14-foot ceilings, cast iron columns, stout overhead wooden beams, masonry construction, and in the case of the Fairchild Building, open ductwork.

"These are features that have traditionally appealed to condo loft buyers," says real estate agent Bill Thiessen of RE/MAX Performance. "When people are looking for a loft, they think of natural wood, exposed brick, industrial finishes, and wide open spaces. It's the openness they are typically looking for."

Units range from 635 square feet to 1,673 square feet and from \$149,900 to \$385,000.

A 1,673-square-foot show suite is now open for viewing. The two-bedroom-and-a-den unit contains a masonry feature wall and the original refurbished maple wood floors, two of the amenities that the owner, Becker Communities LLC of Colorado, retained in each of the units.

"Some of the units have up to three full walls of brick," says Dean Syverson of Syverson Monteyne Architecture Inc., one of two architectural firms involved in the reclamation project. Architect Neil Cooper, the architect of record whose company Neil Cooper Architect Inc. did the majority of design work, said the owners also took care to handle sound well, a benefit that may not be immediately

apparent.

"The existing floor is basically held up by beams and then there was a bunch of old wood," said Cooper. "We infilled between the wooden beams for soundproofing and fireproofing." At the same time, the beams are still visible for aesthetic reasons.

"But airborne noise is reduced through the floor assembly," says Cooper.

Anyone who wants to see the show suite can do so by calling Thiessen at 946-LOFT (5638).

Windows throughout the building have been upgraded to double-pane aluminum, and the owner and architects worked with the city to install replacement units in keeping with the character of the original building.

The windows are clearly one of the bonuses of the structure, says Thiessen. Measuring up to 10.5 feet in height in places and spanning most of the width of some of the walls, the window sizes exceed those found in many buildings of that era and provide a good source of light to the interior.

"While Winnipeg's earlier warehouses had small window openings due to simpler methods of construction and to limit the amount of daylight on dry goods and food products, the display of farm machinery required that ample windows be provided," says the building's history on the Winnipeg website.

Gerhard Hoppenheit, of GWH Construction Management Services Ltd., construction manager for the project, said some of the ornate glass features in the condos were made of 100-year-old glass salvaged from the original building.

GWH gutted much of the interior, decommissioned all the mechanical and electrical systems and then had them upgraded, installed central air conditioning, demolished interior partitions, and installed a new sprinkler system, elevator and new roof.

"We also did things to allow duct shafts to pass through the floors and brought the building up to code requirements," says Hoppenheit. "We installed a new stairwell on the north side of the building and even worked with the city to build a new sidewalk at the front of the building."

"It's a complete refit, we completely redid the building top to bottom," said Hoppenheit of the \$6.4-million renovation.

Underpinning the Fairchild Lofts will be leaseable main floor commercial space facing Princess Street, and a gym at the back of the main floor for the residents' use.

"We're looking for office or retail but we will not include any business that is nuisance-producing," says Thiessen.

A descending ramp will steer owners to parking spaces beneath the building, but other residents will have stalls assigned to them at an enclosed parking compound at ground level behind the building.

"For a downtown development, we have more parking stalls than units, so we will be able to offer up to two stalls for some units, which for downtown is really outstanding," says Thiessen.

Buyers of some main floor suites will also have the option of creating live-work units or residences where they are free to conduct small scale home-based businesses after the city zoned the development appropriately.

"You could certainly work in a low-key way behind the door," says Thiessen.

The company also took care to design some unique green space for the condominium project by adding a landscaped outdoor terrace at back to an area over the ramp leading to the underground parkade. The space could hold barbecues, seating, and greenery at completion.

Finally, a pure piece of history has been turned into a whimsical but highly functional ensuite in one of the units on each floor. Walk-in bank vaults complete with heavy doors were built into the original building.

The owners disabled the locking function of the doors and converted the former vaults to modern ensuites that retain some of the charm of their more historical pecuniary uses.

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