

42nd Street Condos: unique, charming and multi-family

■ *A pattern of exterior and interior features makes each unit — and the building itself — distinctive, yet homey.*

By **CLAIR ENLOW**

Special to the Journal

How do you package the easy living of an apartment with the identity and community feel of a house?

One of the best answers to this question can be found at 952 N. 42nd St., the corner of North 42nd Street and Winslow Place North, in Fremont, just off Aurora.

Developer Cynthia Creasy, who sells real estate, was first an artist and builder. With this kind of background, "You get ideas about how to do things," she said.

Condominiums are a big market for Creasy and her partner Mac McCoy (seattlehomes.com). They were tired of showing people townhouses with pseudo-craftsman detailing and other standard formulas. They wanted open spaces and honest materials with an urban attitude. Quality construction and environmental sensitivity were important, too.

And they wanted to prove something: "You don't have to build a box," said McCoy.

Creasy had her eye on a view lot in the neighborhood, and asked a friend who lived nearby, builder Brian Tschider, to call her if it came on the market. There was an older house on the site, in fairly good condition. It was just a block from the frayed Fifties strip along Aurora Avenue North, but had views of Lake Union and Mount Rainier.

When the "for sale" sign went up, Creasy, McCoy and Tschider bought the house. They hired Greg Bjarko and Chris Serra of BjarkoSerra Architects to consult on the design.

At first, they all worked with the idea of preserving the single-story structure and building up to add units and catch views, but the footprint of the house was not large enough to support another three units. It would be a tear-



The flats at 42nd Street Condos have large windows and individual entrances. The top units have views of Lake Union and Mount Rainier.

Photos courtesy BjarkoSerra Architects



From left to right: Cynthia Creasy, Mac McCoy, Chris Serra, Greg Bjarko (behind) and Amy Martin with daughter.

Photo by Clair Enlow

down/rebuild. And a relief.

“A 1912 house just doesn’t fit modern lifestyle needs,” said McCoy.

Starting fresh allowed the team to reinvent low-rise, multi-family living — in their own way. But they also wanted to be a good neighbor in an area that is changing and still recovering from highway construction and decay along Aurora. It would be a buffer between the single-family neighborhood to the east and the commercial strip on the other side.

“It has to hold its own against the harsher nature of Aurora, and still feel like a residential building,” said Serra.

The wood frame is covered with corrugated metal siding, because of its industrial character and low maintenance. Polycarbonate panels on the balconies add to the mix of modern materials.

Certain aspects of the architecture were determined by the zoning code. The current height limit would accommodate three floors — with one catch: the height includes an allowance for the slope of a gabled roof. In other words, the top floor could have sloping ceilings. The architects gave the building five gables, shaped with an asymmetrical cross hatch of three roof ridges. This move helps to set up a pattern of exterior and interior features that makes each unit — and the building itself — distinctive.

The four condominiums in 42nd Street Condos each have at least three outside walls, outdoor entrances, and a balcony or patio space. The entrances and balconies are all different in placement or size.

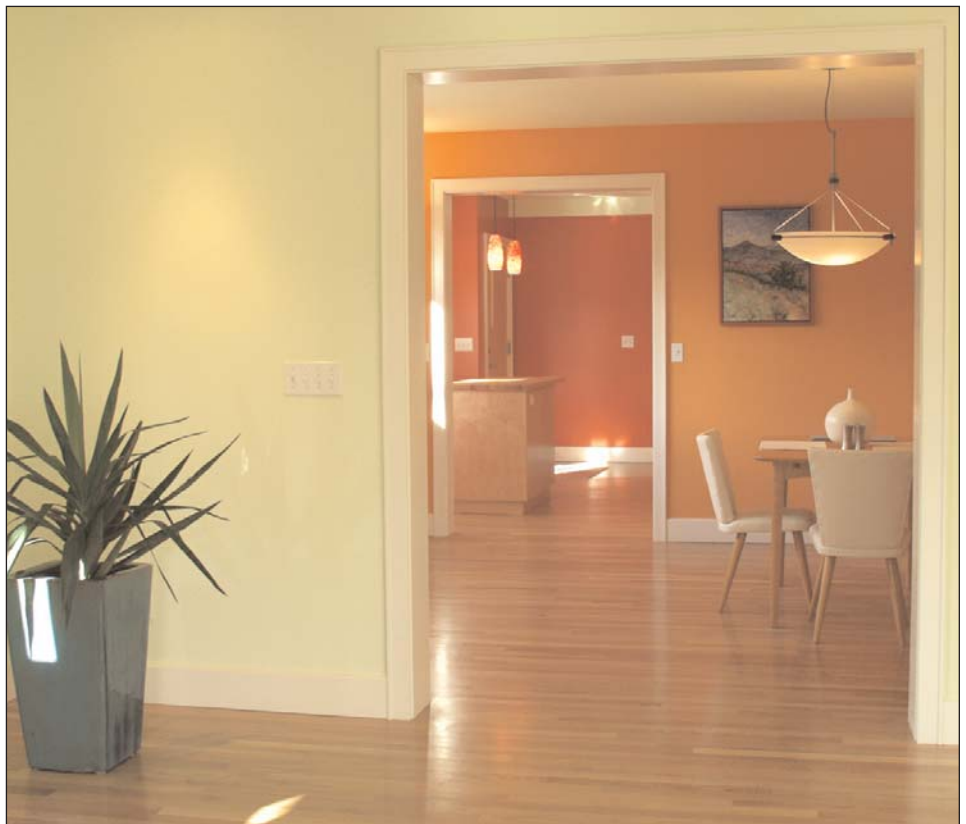
The units “go their own way instead of being regimented to some building’s order,” said Bjarko.

Each of the two largest units, the top and ground floors, have unique charms. The top has a penthouse feel, with 12-foot ceilings and a sweeping city view that includes Lake Union and Mount Rainier. The ridges of the five-gable roof help to define the circulation and living spaces that flow one to another under the lofty peaks of the ceiling. A bank of skylights slopes over the kitchen, and only an island counter separates it from the rest of family life and the expansive view. Even the long entry stair from the front door on the second-level deck became an opportunity. A tall window in the stairwell above the door adds to the natural light throughout.

The street-level condo takes full advantage of its connection to the ground on the sloping site. Three doors function in ways similar to those of a single-family house. The front door leads into the spacious and open living areas. On the other end of the building, a “back door” allows easy access to the kitchen and basement storage areas from the carport. Around the corner is another, which opens to a paved patio. It all ties into a compact but



The upper unit opens all living spaces to sweeping views.



The units feature spacious living areas and plenty of light.

lush landscape of low-maintenance trees, shrubs and groundcovers, with recycled concrete retaining walls.

The secret to success for the two units sandwiched into the second level, according to Bjarko, was to give them plenty of light, outdoor space and identifiable entries. Windows make up more than

half of each unit’s 42 lineal feet of outer wall, for an abundance of natural light. As Bjarko points out, the light — along with large living and dining areas — makes the units feel much larger than their 850 square feet.

The three levels of the building are well separated.

Concrete floors of the second and third levels are two-and-a-half inches thick, nearly double the typical dimension, and enough to add a substantial sound buffer and make room for a radiant electric heating system. Both were important to the vision shared by the design and development team, a vision that included energy savings and long-term value.

Amy Martin bought the top floor unit and moved in with her young family in December 2001. She and her husband sold an older single-family house on Capitol Hill to make the switch.

Their friends were baffled. "Oh my — you don't have a yard anymore?" Martin quoted them.

Her two young daughters will soon have a climbing wall in their high-ceilinged room. They ride their trikes around the open floor, and visit nearby parks to run. Martin can relax in her home and enjoy the view without guilt about all of the things that need doing in and around a typical single-family home.

"Most people buy condominiums because they don't want to do house work," said McCoy, who grew up in Manhattan.

The condos were sold by April 2002, even though they went on sale Sept. 9, 2001. There was a lot of interest. "You get the most bang for the buck if people really sense that the building is designed for its location," said Bjarko.

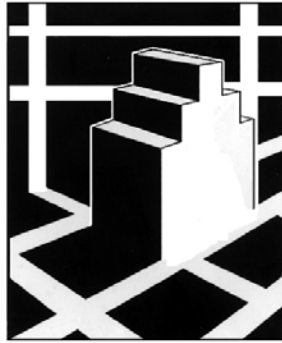
McCoy credits the architects for setting up the interior volumes and making the spaces work.

"Nothing's wrong," he said. "No walking into awkward corners. No stepchild units, no dead spaces."

"I didn't used to love being in my house," added Martin. "Now I love being in my house."

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Jury comments



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PROJECT OF THE MONTH

Nice scale and use of materials to make a very comfortable fit with site — high degree of privacy and individuality for a multi-family project.

This four-unit condominium borrows from its neighbors: the industrial materials of the multi-family buildings on Aurora Avenue North as well as the intimate context and details of nearby single-family residences.

Terrific use of industrial-based materials in a humane manner. The residential units retain their individuality, while benefiting from the economy of scale in a condo setting.

42nd Street Condos

Architect - BjarkoSerra Architects

Owner/developers - Cynthia Creasey and Mack McCoy
Brian and Anne Tschider

Project type - Multi-Family

Unit Sizes

Lower level: 2,000 square feet

Middle level: 850 square feet.

Upper level: 1,500 square feet

Completion date - September 2001

Construction cost - \$1.1 million

Structural engineer - Swenson Say Faget

Interiors - Cynthia Creasey

Landscape Design - Ingela Wanerstrand

General contractor - Cobalt Construction

The Project of the Month feature is sponsored by the Daily Journal of Commerce and the Seattle chapter of the American Institute of Architects. The Project of the Month for August, 42nd Street Condos, by BjarkoSerra Architects, was selected with the assistance of architects Peter Hockaday, Marilyn Brockman and Bill Fuller; and developer Val Thomas. For more information about submitting projects for possible feature articles, contact Peter Sackett at AIA Seattle, (206) 448-4938, or psackett@aia-seattle.org.