

THE MAGAZINE OF SPLENDID HOMES AND GARDENS • JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2008

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BECAUSE DESIGN SELLS

Greater Boston developers are catching on that bringing interior designers in on the ground floor gives their projects a competitive edge

Written by GAIL RAVGIALA

WHEN IT COMES TO REAL ESTATE, LOCATION, location, location is the indisputable heart of marketing. But in the highly competitive arena of luxury condominium communities, securing a name-brand interior designer who can tweak floor plans, select finishes, and furnish public spaces is, along with address, key to attracting high-end buyers.

"Great design is integral to our product," says Curtis Kemeny, president of Boston Residential Group, a five-year-old real estate development company. "It is absolutely essential to what we do."

Among BRG's residential projects is the iconic former home of Tower Records at 360 Newbury Street in Boston's Back Bay and the residential building at 285 Columbus Avenue in the city's South End. Both buildings were designed by ADD Inc of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Interiors were handled by Meichi Peng, who initially was on the ADD team but has since opened her own firm, Meichi Peng Design Studio, also in the South End.

"Our clients have high expectations. Having a name-brand designer is worth every penny," says Kemeny. "It comes back to us in terms of customer satisfaction."

Kevin Ahearn, president of Otis & Ahearn Real Estate, a Boston real estate sales and marketing company, has understood that for nearly a decade. In 1998, he brought in Boston designers Gauthier-Stacy to do the interiors at Trinity Place, a Copley Square condo project, and he was involved with connecting French architect Philippe Starck to Parris Landing in the Charlestown Navy

Yard in 2005. More recently, Ahearn recommended interior designer Celeste Cooper as a style partner for the Residences at the Intercontinental in Boston. "I thought she was a perfect fit," says Ahearn. "She has a contemporary vernacular" that was suited to the sleek glass tower designed by Boston architects Elkus/Manfredi on Boston's Fort Point Channel.

"Sometimes this is seen as just attaching a name to a project," says Cooper of The Orpin Group in North Easton, Massachusetts. "It is a great deal more than that." She sees her relationship with the architect as mutually beneficial. "Architects design from the outside in; an interior designer designs from the inside out. It is important to understand and acknowledge what the architect is trying to say and what the developer is trying to present. I am adding a visual cohesion."

Among the tasks Brian Fallon, then managing director of Extell Development, developers of the Intercontinental, assigned Cooper, was designing the lobbies. "You should know when you walk into the lobby 'who' the building is," she says. "This is a very muscular building, so I used furnishings with impact." There are bronze panels, iron and stone tables, and fabrics that add a lot of luster. In one buyer's opinion, she got it just right. "As soon as we saw the lobby, we knew this was the building for us," he says.

ADD Inc and Ahearn are also involved with a cutting-edge project outside the city. Nouvelle at Natick is the brainchild of developer General Growth Properties, the owner of more than 200 shopping malls nationwide. Theirs is a concept whose time has come, at least according to planners who embrace the notion of mixed-use developments as a better utilization of land and resources. So, adjacent to the New Natick Collection shopping





← Striking arched windows provide a backdrop for the contemporary design in a model unit at 360 Newbury Street by Meichi Peng.



← A transitional style that hints at a family history makes Susan Dearborn's model unit at Nouvelle at Natick feel fresh, yet warm and inviting.

mall, GGP is erecting a 600-foot-long building that will house 251 condominiums. Owners will have access to the mall by just walking down the hall.

Aaron Bartels, senior director of residential development for GGP, says, "With this kind of project, we needed strong branding throughout." That meant attention to every detail of the design. The lead interior designer for the complex is Nancy Linné of ADD Inc, who handled the public spaces and selected finish options for the individual units. She took her cues from focus groups of potential buyers before the project started. "They were looking for something different from what is seen in the Boston market," says Linné. "They didn't want to live in the past, but they wanted luxury that felt attainable."

And they wanted light-filled spaces. Tamara Roy, the project architect from ADD Inc, kept that in mind when she sited elevators so that they would open to spaces with windows and designed common areas with lots of natural light.

To design a model unit, Bartels turned to Susan Dearborn Interiors of Wellesley, Massachusetts. "She is a well-known, respected designer from an area where our buyers are likely to come," says Bartels.

Dearborn sees the project as "a synthesis of suburban and urban living." In planning the model unit, she was careful to include pieces that one might imagine came from a former home. "I wanted to complement the architecture and help the buyer understand what it would be like to live here," she says. "Sometimes clients want to just get rid of everything and start clean, but if you come with no memories, it would be like living in a boutique hotel. I wanted this interior to be warm and inviting, which is not necessarily the case in a downtown tower."

The Duffy Design Group's latest condo affiliation is with The Marquis in Boston's theater district, a 14 story building being built by Abbot Development and designed by Shesky Architects, both of Boston. The 60 studio and 12 one-

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bedroom units are being marketed as pieds-à-terre, and principal Dennis Duffy's approach is to create progressive low-maintenance retreats with built-in elements that will allow owners to move in with just the basics. "You want to distinguish yourself," says Jim McAuliffe, a principal at Abbott. "Bringing in someone like Dennis, one, the design is terrific, and, two, his name adds to the cachet of our building." 🏠

The pieds-à-terre envisioned by Dennis Duffy at The Marquis have built-in elements that make for a modern look and low-maintenance living.



Celeste Cooper incorporated a table big enough for a dinner party into this model unit at the Residences at the Intercontinental. "These are the things that are important to these clients," she says.

