

Chicago Tribune REAL ESTATE



CYNTHIA LYNN/PROJECT INTERIORS PHOTOS

Architect Chris Talsma and designers Aimee Wertepny and Jennifer Kranitz connected two spaces on different levels of a Gold Coast luxury high-rise in 2015.

A little elbow room

High-rise duplexes are popping up downtown, padding amenities with more luxury

BY TATE GUNNERSON

Jeff and Kelly Baker didn't have a duplex in mind when they began searching for an in-towner near the Riverwalk, restaurants and cultural attractions in downtown Chicago last year.

Then the Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, residents toured the new development Renelle on the River, 403 N. Wabash Ave., and discovered the building offered several multilevel condos.

Ultimately, they bought a 1,827-square-foot residence with one bedroom on the lower level and two bedrooms upstairs — plenty of space for them and their two children.

"We aren't high-rise individuals, but this seemed more like a home instead of a condo," Kelly Baker said. "We're not all on top of each other."

The Bakers also appreciate the building's many amenities, which include parking; 24-hour security; an onsite workout facility; and a rooftop deck with a dog walk, a lounge and a theater room.

"The perks are phenomenal, and it's a very secure building, so I have zero concerns about safety," Kelly Baker said.

Theirs is one of many high-rise duplexes currently available or under construction in the Chicago market. Others include Cirrus at 211 N. Harbor Drive, The Cooper Southbank at 720 S. Wells St., Porte (formerly The Venn) at 855 W. Madison St. and Old Town Park at 202 W. Hill St.

And then there's acclaimed architect Jeanne Gang's Vista Tower, 363-401 E. Wacker Drive, which features a two-floor, 6,986-square-foot penthouse on the market for \$18.5 million. The \$1 billion high-



An 8,000-square-foot Gold Coast condo combined with the 4,000-square-foot residence above it gave owners room for open-concept spaces, a golf/media room, and more.

rise is expected to have its first residents move in this summer, with the entire project wrapping by the end of 2020.

While not part of the original plans, Vista Tower's developers, Magellan Development Group, realized it would be relatively simple to fold in a second-floor addition.

Duplexes were not initially part of the plans for Renelle on the River either, says Alan Lev, chairman of the building's developer, Belgravia Group.

Lev and his team decided at the last minute to convert some of the residences

into more spacious duplexes like the one Jeff and Kelly Baker purchased. So far, three of the five units have sold.

"We've done combined side-by-side units before, but I think these have an even better flow, and they offer a little more privacy," Lev says.

Whether or not to incorporate duplex units depends on the lot size, layout and the marketplace at any given time, Lev said, noting that Belgravia Group also included five duplex penthouses at CA6, a new residential tower now under construction at the corner of Jackson Boulevard and

Racine Avenue in the West Loop.

In addition to their size — about 1,000 square feet larger than the single-floor units — the duplexes will have second-floor family rooms that open to private roof decks boasting spectacular city views. All five have sold.

What's driving the appetite for such spaces? Many Chicagoans are settling down, having kids and seeking more space, Lev explained, pointing to the bustling student population at nearby Skinner West Elementary School.

"You really can't find a free-standing single-family home in the West Loop, and we can't even build town homes anymore," he says. "Either the land is way too expensive, or the site is too small. You need at least an acre."

Duplexes within high-rise residential towers are not a new concept in Chicago; designed by local architect Seymour S. Goldstein and completed in 1965, the 30-story brutalist Granville Tower at 6166 N. Sheridan Road in Edgewater is comprised entirely of two-level units.

Water Tower Place, Four Seasons Hotel Chicago residences and the Olympia Centre also offered duplex dwellings when they debuted.

Some homeowners are even carving out their own. In 2015, architect Chris Talsma and interior designers Aimee Wertepny and Jennifer Kranitz launched a project to connect their client's 8,000-square-foot condo on the 46th floor of a Gold Coast high-rise with a 4,000-square-foot space above it.

The addition includes a kitchen, a

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ELITE STREET

The Woods sell Winnetka mansion for \$4.15 million

BY BOB GOLDSBOROUGH

Retired Chicago Cubs pitcher Kerry Wood and his wife, Sarah, on Wednesday slimmed down their real estate portfolio further, selling their six-bedroom, 11,000-square-foot French Provincial-style mansion in Winnetka for \$4.15 million.

Wood played for the Cubs for most of his 15-year Major League Baseball career. He and his wife now run their Wood Family Foundation, and he also serves as a special assistant for the Cubs.

They sold their mansion because they moved closer to Lake Michigan. As Elite Street reported in December, the Woods in July paid \$4 million for a six-bedroom,

7,798-square-foot vintage Georgian Revival-style mansion on a 0.71-acre parcel in Winnetka that had not been publicly listed. They subsequently received permits for a \$92,400 pool, an estimated \$90,000 pool house and an estimated \$125,510 for an outdoor fire pit, outdoor kitchen, pergola and patios, according to Winnetka village records.

The couple paid \$3.8 million in 2015 for the French Provincial-style mansion. They listed it in June for just under \$4.4 million, and in September cut their asking price to slightly below \$4.3 million. Built in 2014, the mansion has nine bathrooms, five fireplaces, a white marble kitchen with a 13-foot island and two butler's pantries, a

first-floor office with French doors, a mud room, a second staircase, a master suite with an oversized closet, and a lower level with a sport court, a media room and bar, a wine cellar, a theater and a craft room.

The Woods' listing agent could not be reached for comment on the sale. Public records do not yet identify the buyer of the mansion.

The sale of the mansion means the Woods are again down to one Chicago-area home. Over the years, they have owned a host of area properties. They first paid \$712,000 in 2003 for a River North condo that they sold in 2005 for \$760,000. They

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KRISTAN LIEB/FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Kerry and Sarah Wood are back to owning just one Chicago-area home.

Duplexes

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lounge, a guest suite, a golf/media room, and spaces for yoga and meditation.

“The clients take a lot of pleasure in friendships, socializing and creating community, and this is a great place for them to do that,” Kranitz said.

Their clients later bought yet another condo on the 48th floor, with plans to connect it as well.

In Water Tower Place, Berkshire Hathaway agent Michael Rosenblum is currently listing a 5,508-square-foot duplex, which a former owner combined, for \$3.5 million.

Duplexes within residential towers appeal to clients who are looking for not only more space, but also the convenience and perks of high-rise living, Rosenblum said.

While some people balk at the often-pricy assess-



THE COOPER AT SOUTHBANK

The Cooper at Southbank features 26 townhouse-style apartments, which span two or three floors each in the 29-story building.

ments, which can run as high as thousands of dollars per month, Rosenblum said that once you consider ongoing maintenance and utilities, the overall cost is comparable to a single-family home in an established neighborhood like Lincoln Park.

“If you have a leak in the

roof in a single-family home, you have to stay home from work and wait for the maintenance person,” he said. “At a luxury high-rise, you can call the management office or building concierge, and they will come up and fix it at no cost.”

That said, Rosenblum

wouldn't go so far as to describe it as a trend, pointing out that younger people are increasingly seeking out smaller spaces.

He noted the growing popularity of so-called micro apartments, which offer smaller private spaces coupled with amenity-packed common areas for



VHT STUDIOS

In Water Tower Place, Berkshire Hathaway agent Michael Rosenblum is currently listing a 5,508-square-foot duplex, which a former owner combined.

socializing.

Other new developments, such as the Tribune Tower Residences, offer only single-floor condos, he added.

“There will always be a market for duplex units in high-rise buildings, but I'm not convinced it will be a big trend in the future,” Rosenblum said.

Jeff and Kelly Baker are not worried. In fact, they

feel bullish about their duplex and highly recommend it to other families seeking the feeling of a single-family home in an urban milieu.

“Owning a two-story unit is kind of unique, and I believe it was a good investment,” Kelly said. “It feels like our little secret.”

Tate Gunnerson is a freelance writer.

Elite

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paid \$1.3 million in 2004 for a vintage house in the Old Town Triangle, which they sold for a loss in 2008 for \$1.2 million.

The couple traded up to a four-bedroom, Beaux Arts-style mansion in Lincoln Park in 2008, which they bought for \$3.32 million but sold at a loss in 2017 for \$3 million.

The Woods also paid \$4.63 million in 2010 for a historic Tudor Revival-style mansion in Winnetka that they sought to raze. They ultimately decided not to go forward and instead sold that mansion at a loss in late 2013 for \$4.18 million. They then paid \$3.8 million for the French Provincial-style mansion that they just sold.

Also, the couple paid \$3.8 million for a waterfront mansion in Fontana, Wisconsin, in 2014, and then

sold it in 2017 for \$4.7 million. And they lost money on an earlier, approximately 8,000-square-foot house they had owned in Paradise Valley, Arizona, selling it in 2011 for \$2.27 million after buying it in 2003 for \$2.52 million.

Philanthropist Deborah Bricker sells Gold Coast condo for \$3.9 million: Retired Chicago businesswoman and philanthropist Deborah Bricker on Feb. 26 sold her two-bedroom, 3,543-square-foot condominium in a luxury Gold Coast building for \$3.9 million.

That was the same amount that Bricker — who sold her Bricker & Associates operations improvement consulting firm to Boston consulting firm Keane Inc. in 1998 — paid for the seven-room condo in late 2013. After buying it, Bricker embarked on a three-year, total renovation of the unit, which is on the fourth floor of an eight-



CHICAGO TRIBUNE

The 30,000-square-foot Burr Ridge mansion known as Villa Taj has reached its lowest asking price yet: \$5 million.

story building designed by Lucien Lagrange and completed in 2003. The condo has 2½ baths, hardwood floors in the living room and family room, and a balcony.

Bricker, who also has a home in Palm Beach, Florida, used interior designer Kelly Rosen and architect Steve Rugo to remake the

unit. In another interesting tie, in 2016, Bricker's daughter married Lagrange's son.

The condo was placed into the real estate multiple listing service at the time of the sale, and is described as “sold before print” — a sign that a buyer emerged quickly.

Bricker's listing agent did

not respond to a request for comment.

Public records do not yet identify the buyer.

Villa Taj in Burr Ridge — one of Chicagoland's languishing megamansions — drops price to \$5 million: A 30,214-square-foot, Middle Eastern-influenced mansion in Burr Ridge, once listed for \$25 million, took a \$1 million price cut Thursday, setting it at its lowest asking price yet, at \$5 million.

Once known as Villa Taj and then known as the Palace Royale, the mansion was listed for \$25 million by then-owner Husam Aldairi and then reduced to \$13 million before it suffered massive flooding from the bursting of a water pipe. It eventually was foreclosed on and sold at a sheriff's sale for \$3.1 million to Arvin Lourdenadin, who cleaned it up and relisted it for \$10.95 million in 2016.

Despite a price cut to \$7

million in November 2018 and to \$6 million in July, Lourdenadin still didn't see an offer he liked. So he has it back on the market for \$5 million.

“It's below cost and below (his) investment,” listing agent Lisa Petrik of Jameson Sotheby's said of Lourdenadin. “It's time to move it. Someone needs to come get a deal.”

Petrik noted that within five minutes of posting the lower price, the mansion received an offer. She declined to comment on whether her client will accept that offer.

The mansion is among the most high-profile homes in the Chicago area that have struggled to find buyers over the past decade.

Bob Goldsborough is a freelance writer.

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