

## *California Construction*

### **Empty Office Building Finds Some Love: 1100 Wilshire Converted to Condos**

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By Greg Aragon

The 22-story triangular spire, hovering over the west side of the 110 Freeway in downtown Los Angeles, sat virtually vacant for nearly 20 years before a trio of developers bought it in 2004. Next month, completion of the \$50-million project will produce 230 high-end condominiums in about 260,000 sq. ft. of living space.

It took nearly 20 years of neglect before a 22-story office building near downtown Los Angeles found some loving developers.

"We are excited about this project," said Greg Vilkin, president of Los Angeles-based Forest City West Residential. "Being on the west side of the 110 Freeway, it has the best views in Los Angeles--360 degrees in every single unit."

The tower, dubbed 1100 Wilshire for its address, is a 430,000-square-foot (259,469 square-foot of living space) building on the southwest corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Bixel Street that was built in 1986 as the Rolls Royce Office Tower. It remained practically vacant until Forest City, along with MacFarlane Partners and TMG Partners, both of San Francisco, purchased it in July 2004 for \$40 million from Format Corp., a subsidiary of Taiwan-based Formosa Plastics.

"Unfortunately for the former owner, 1100 Wilshire was completed when there was an overabundance of newly completed office space and just before the recession of the early 1990s, both of which dramatically affected the office market in downtown Los Angeles," said David Dressler, chief acquisition officer for MacFarlane Partners.

"In addition, the property was at a disadvantage relative to other office buildings nearby because it is separated from the main financial district by the 110 Freeway. It was probably hard to attract a lot of large tenants on a long-term basis."

The \$50-million project consists of the conversion of the 496-ft.-tall structure into 230 luxury condominiums for sale and 11,000 sq. ft. of lower-level retail for lease.

Floor plans range from 788 sq. ft. for studios to 3,466 sq. ft. for four penthouses. One bedroom, two-bedroom and two-story loft-style plans also will be available, as well as custom layouts, Vilkin said. Prices range from the high-\$400,000s to nearly \$2 million.

Irvine-based Thomas P. Cox: Architects Inc. and Los Angeles-based AC Martin Partners are the project architects. Webcor Builders of San Mateo is the general contractor.

Unlike boxy Los Angeles high-rises, 1100 Wilshire is distinguished by a 22-story triangular tower--clad in blue-green mirrored glass--that is perched on top of a 15-story granite and concrete parking structure.

Vilkin said rerouting the plumbing systems posed the greatest challenge.

"On every floor, and when you do 12 units per floor, you have 24 cores for bathrooms and kitchens," he said. "You have to re-core the building 37 stories high."

Ken Wipff, Webcor's senior project manager, said, "You basically have to stack up all the bathrooms" from the bottom floor to the top.

"You don't want horizontal runs in your plumbing because if you take the plumbing down through a floor, you are basically in the ceiling of the residence below," he added. "You don't want to have to go into somebody's bedroom and say, 'Hey, I need to get into your ceiling to snake out my plumbing.' So everything has to be vertical."

With 350 bathrooms, as well as a myriad of holes for kitchens, heating, cooling and electric, Wipff said the project required more than 300 cores on every floor. He said crews used a laser to precisely line up all the holes on the tower's 22 floors.

"What we did was lay out a typical floor, drill the holes where we want them, confirm that is where we want them and then use a laser to laser down and up," Wipff added. "What is interesting about this is that if you stand on the bottom floor and look up, you look up 22 floors with 6-in. cores that are dead on."

The conversion began with interior demolition in September 2004 and will be officially complete next month.

Currently, the condos are 70 percent sold, with homeowners starting to move in.

Vilkin said he expects to have that the rest of the units sold by the end of the quarter. As of December, no retailers had signed leases, he said. But that should change soon since several major residential projects are coming out of the ground just east and southeast of 1100 Wilshire, which should create the critical mass of residents needed to lease additional retail space.

Because the first livable floor is being built on top of the 17-story parking garage, residents of 1100 Wilshire will have panoramic views of downtown Los Angeles to the immediate east, the Hollywood Hills to the north and the San Gabriel Mountains to the north. And these vistas have been secured by city zoning changes already in place when 1100 Wilshire was built, which prevent new high-rise construction in the vicinity.

The 1100 Wilshire complex includes 700 parking spaces in four subterranean and 11 above-grade levels. About 570 spaces are earmarked for residents, and 130 spaces are set aside for visitors.

Vilkin said that tenants will be given one unreserved parking space per bedroom and the rest of the spots will be for sale for between \$10,000 and \$20,000 each.

Because the structure was built as an office building "we have twice as much parking as would be required [for a ground-up residential project]," Vilkin said. "And what is unique is that we are selling the parking in this building separate and apart from the condos."