

## **Portland 38 and Evergreen 9 Loft Style Townhouse Type Condominiums**

### **Loft Style**

#### Disclosure:

The houses are designed to give owners the most space for their money. The spaces are open and flexible, some would say unfinished. There are very few or no partitions, doors or closets. The finishes are simple. The windows are oversized. The owner needs to add personal creative touches to domesticate the space -- to add wardrobes for closet space, to determine which room will be the living room and which the studio or den, to add color to the walls, and to make the spaces warm.

#### Discussion:

The term “loft” has become overused and faddish. The term originated in the SoHo district of New York City. Artists looking for affordable studio space began renting industrial loft space in buildings that were being abandoned by industrial tenants that left for the suburbs. The loft spaces were attractive for artists because they were large, open areas with big windows and high ceilings and lots of natural light. The characteristics required for industrial production was attractive to artists. Soon the artists desired to live in their studio lofts also. At first this was done illegally since the lofts had never been designed as housing and did not meet housing codes. Over time the City of New York gave in to pressure from the arts community to accommodate them with special reduced code enforcement for artist’s lofts. The artists usually improved their lofts with bathrooms, kitchens, cleverly fit-in sleeping areas, and the like; but they maintained the large, open, high-ceilinged, light-filled sense of space. The rough finishes of the industrial bones were usually left. The simple unfinished open look that originated out of need and economy soon became stylish. The artists have had to leave trendy So-Ho as wealthier people who wanted to live in such a creative feeling environment drove up the price of the real estate.

The architect at Evergreen 9 dislikes most of the architecture of housing in Phoenix. Houses and apartments seem too chopped up and complicated. The number of rooms and bathrooms is more advertised than the quality of the space or light. The typical reaction he has to most housing on the market is that it would be better to buy the unit in an unfinished form with just the structural walls and raw space, and redesign the interior without so many partitions and doors and fussy little closets. In preliminary discussions with the developer of Evergreen 9 the architect and developer found it hard to know what future buyers would want—how many bedrooms?, which space should be the living room?, will the ground floor room be a family room or a work shop? So the houses are designed as lofts, a series of rooms without predetermined uses. The buyer’s creativity is required to customize and domesticate the

house. Fewer partitions and doors and closets maintains flexibility while partially offsetting the additional cost of high-end finishes, top quality oversized windows, and masonry and steel construction. This approach can be a win-win for buyers who want to be creative, as the developer doesn't have to guess what owners want and can offer a higher quality home.

## **Townhouse Type**

Denser housing is good for urban neighborhoods. The only way good urban neighborhoods can afford the variety and intensity that people who love cities crave is for there to be a lot of households per acre. Higher numbers of people are needed to support the small shops and local restaurants. The walking access to museums and libraries is only possible in more central locations with higher land prices. Anyone who has ever spent any time in Paris, New York, or San Francisco understands the advantages of density. The problem with denser housing is that it often lacks the privacy that low density suburban single family houses offer. Living in an apartment building with common lobbies and corridors, and one person's ceiling serving as another person's floor can be difficult. It isn't that we don't like other people, it's just that sometimes we want them to leave us alone and we don't want to hear them. Throughout good neighborhoods close to central cities one housing type stands out as offering the best of both worlds – density with privacy – and that is the townhouse. The townhouse or “row-house” is where houses sit on the ground with a front and a back, and have private yard space and privately controlled space for the owner's vehicles, and where density is achieved by pushing houses together with a common party wall. Party walls (more easily than floor/ceilings because there is less impact noise) can be made heavy to help with acoustical separation. Mechanical and electrical systems can be kept separate within the confines of party walls so that the systems are not shared and holes cut to run pipes are not acoustical leaks.

The houses are condominiums in terms of ownership. To achieve density we have fit nine houses on a 70 foot by 190 foot lot, and thirty-eight houses on a 200 foot by 350 foot lot. Because the lots were originally laid out for lower density detached housing, many units do not front onto the public street. This requires the developments to use condominium ownership. Each resident will control the land their unit occupies and their private yard. Other area including driveways, walks, and extra parking will be in shared ownership. But unlike condominiums that are basically converted apartment buildings, each unit has a private garage space and yard and first floor room on private ground.