

# McAllister St. micro-condos lead market-rate boom in Tenderloin

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Why two styles — old new world versus new new world?

The site does have a past — it's among the turn-of-the-century buildings in the area designated by government officials as "contributing to the historic value of the City's Civic Center district." Such special standing means no changes at all — zero, nada — could be made to 83 McAllister's facade, including any architectural changes to windows and doors. No underground garage either.

Even so, the structure still had to be brought up to rigid seismic standards — as must all unreinforced masonry buildings here in earthquake country.

The previous owner, the Church of Scientology, realized it would take big bucks to bring the place up to seismic snuff, to remodel and also to retain the building's original flavor. So, the Scientologists sold the property in 2003 to San Francisco developers who call themselves Group I — "I" as in international.

Group I had a track record in condominium development — especially the South of Market loft, high-tech kind. However, the developers meant the BCB project to be different, more "exciting."

Their vision gave birth to what Group I has dubbed the micro-condominium — minimalist city living at its best.

A micro-condo is mighty small — compared with most condominiums — yet each studio is equipped with a full kitchen and full bath. At 250 square feet it is about 25% bigger than an SRO unit where the toilet is down the hall and not even a hot plate is allowed.

From the very start, it made good financial sense in the minds of the developers to convert the existing offices into condominiums. And even better sense, they figured, to keep the condos small — micro in size — yet stylish.

This concept, they believed, would appeal to a certain type of buyer — starting with the first-time home buyer. The places were going to be affordable by San Francisco standards.

Buyers would come from the laptop-cell phone-iPod set. Also the developers intended to make a pitch to out-of-towners wanting a convenient San Francisco address for doing fun things — music at the symphony, art at the museums, mojitos at a local club.

In the overall scheme of start-up matters, Group I saw the need. It didn't hurt either that the Group I people had combined back-



PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO

grounds in design and planning, also law and banking.

Back when the Methodist Church was in control, after the earthquake and fire of 1906, the Methodists decided to build a place of their own in the heart of the downtown rubble, thereby establishing a physical presence in the newly emerging civic-business-residential corridor.

The Methodist Book Concern building was primarily used back then for printing and storing church books and pamphlets. Also offices — spare and functional — were being offered to members of the congregation.

It still can deliver, with its certain no-frills design, a mighty punch — not a wasted inch of precious space.

A studio at the Book Concern Building dimensions in at about the size of an average bedroom in the burbs. A two-bedroom unit is around 600 square feet — tiny by most city apartment standards.

Yet all the basics are there — and even more. Each kitchen has a custom fabricated stainless steel countertop and sink, a dual-handled wall faucet, a cook top with two burners, a convection/microwave oven, an under-counter refrigerator-freezer, shelving and cabinets. The only appliance not available in the compact kitchen is a dishwasher.

Each bathroom has a top-of-the-line Toto toilet, an ample-size, recessed medicine cabinet with mirror and a tiled-in shower. Some of the condos even have tubs, with an overhead shower, squeezed in.

Storage issues were handled creatively — open shelving, built-in modular cabinetry, bars and hooks in strategic locations, sliding panel partitions. And there's also the convenient open loft — available in a number of units — to provide additional storage up high. The lofts come with movable aluminum ladders, of course.

As for furnishings, that's up to residents. But don't envision an overstuffed Pottery Barn sofa and a California-king bed. That just won't work here. However, a couple of families with small children already have found that the micro-condos can be made to work for them.

It probably won't be a big group around the Thanksgiving table. If that's what you're hoping for, then you're missing the point.

This is an environment more for laptops and flat panel TVs. By the way, all condos are wired for DSL.

Architect Wes Jones, of El Segundo in L.A. County, states on his Web site that "coolness matters," so by his standards BCB would be something sweet, especially for the young and hip. Jones' concept was that "less space is necessary because a resident is either out in the

city or in cyberspace." Back to reality, Jones and his team planned all of the construction changes including the installation of exposed seismic brace frames and an interior light court.

Other structural features of the building are new floors, ceilings, interior partitions, a roof deck, stairwells and an elevator. Also an existing lightwell was extended down through the floors to the basement to throw a shaft of natural light from the roof all the way to the bottom.

Polychrome Design, San Francisco industrial-environmental designers, enhanced the interiors of each condo. Exposed brick, laminated flooring of various simulated dark and light wood, dolphin gray tile are among the surface materials used.

These are not cookie-cutter condos. They do not all come with the same dimensions and floor plans. For instance, there were existing interior columns in many of the spaces that had to be reckoned with. Also varying ceiling heights — 12 feet, 15 feet, 17 feet. In a certain way, each and every space became an original design.

Throughout the building there is a lightness and airiness. Windows are large, providing an abundance of natural light.

Color also matters. The walls are painted mostly a soft — not institutional — white with some neutrals for accent. Jolts of color come from the murals painted at the elevator entrance of each floor.

Artist Brian Barnecl, known around town for impressive artworks, often on the outside of buildings, was commissioned to do the inside murals at the Book Concern. His inspiration: "billboards, buildings, people of San Francisco."

The lines flow, the shapes billow, lots of white with vivid hues of colors that seem to come from another era.

How to classify the Barnecl murals? Maybe, retro that rocks. ■

city or in cyberspace."

Back to reality, Jones and his team planned all of the construction changes including the installation of exposed seismic brace frames and an interior light court.

Other structural features of the building are new floors, ceilings, interior partitions, a roof deck, stairwells and an elevator.

Also an existing lightwell was extended down through the floors to the basement to throw a shaft of natural light from the roof all the way to the bottom.

Polychrome Design, San Francisco industrial-environmental designers, enhanced the interiors of each condo. Exposed brick, laminated flooring of various simulated dark and light wood, dolphin gray tile are among the surface materials used.

These are not cookie-cutter condos. They do not all come with the same dimensions and floor plans. For instance, there were existing interior columns in many of the spaces that had to be reckoned with. Also varying ceiling heights — 12 feet, 15 feet, 17 feet. In a certain way, each and every space became an original design.

Throughout the building there is a lightness and airiness. Windows are large, providing an abundance of natural light.

Color also matters. The walls are painted mostly a soft — not institutional — white with some neutrals for accent. Jolts of color come from the murals painted at the elevator entrance of each floor.

Artist Brian Barnecl, known around town for impressive artworks, often on the outside of buildings, was commissioned to do the inside murals at the Book Concern. His inspiration: "billboards, buildings, people of San Francisco."

The lines flow, the shapes billow, lots of white with vivid hues of colors that seem to come from another era.

How to classify the Barnecl murals? Maybe, retro that rocks. ■



Condo windows face a central interior light court, above, graced with exposed seismic braces. Living room of the airy fifth-floor one-bedroom, below, features exposed brick and large windows, open to an existing lightwell.



## Suddenly, condos the hot housing in TL

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

THE Book Concern Building at 83 McAllister is in a class by itself: the first condo project in the heart of the Tenderloin for almost half a century. It's trumped only by the Hamilton Condos at 631 O'Farrell, 186 units that in 1962 became the neighborhood's — and California's — first condominium conversion.

"This was originally the Alexander Hamilton Hotel, built in 1929," said George Dias, who bought his 520-square-foot Hamilton condo four years ago. "All rooms had a kitchenette, so they were amenable to being changed into condos."

Dias, who is vice president of Alliance for a Better District 6, said most Hamilton units are about the size of his and sell for about \$350,000. A handful of units are up to 750 square feet and cost proportionately more. To get additional space, some owners have bought two units and knocked down walls, he said.

Book Concern and Hamilton soon will be joined by other condos and market-rate housing in the Tenderloin.

At 168 Hyde, developers demolished a service station and have begun excavation for a four-story building that will offer 17 studios and 14 one-bedroom market-rate condos, according to Tony Kim, former project manager.

Also this year, renovation starts at 130 Turk, the old Bulldog Baths. In two years, says project sponsor David Nale, 10 market-rate residential condos and one commercial condo will be for sale in the three-story building.

Other projects are on the table but haven't taken off, and some have been in the pipeline

for almost 10 years. They include:

- 277 Golden Gate. Back in 1999, Planning approved the building permit for this six-story project to transform the former Channel 7 building into 92 one-bedroom condos, but it appears to have stalled. Project manager Seamus Naughton says it's "up in the air," and he'll have no definitive info until early summer. If it flies, the condos would be "below San Francisco market rate," he said, but concedes that they'd still be "pretty expensive."

- 245-259 Hyde. Condos for this site also are on hold, according to Brad Dickason of developer A.F. Evans. He cited increased construction costs for the delay in the project, which would demolish three adjacent historic buildings, while preserving their Deco facades, and build 115 studios and one-, two- and three-bedroom condos. They were planned as below market-rate "workforce housing" for middle-income workers who earn from 80% to 120% of the area median income.

- 351 Turk and 145 Leavenworth. Another A.F. Evans project are the condos in new structures that will be built on parking lots that the developer purchased two years ago from the Central YMCA. Ruthy Bennett, project manager, says there probably will be 40 one- and two-bedroom condos, but it's too early for details. The Y also sold its building at 220 Golden Gate to A.F. Evans, which will renovate it for low-income housing.

- 942 Market. Renovation of the seven-story historic building, scheduled to open this August, will include 28 condos — 15 of them market-rate one-bedrooms that average 740 square feet, and 13 one-, two- and three-bedroom below market-rate units that average 980 square feet. Bob Perigoe of the Hunter Group, the develop-

er, says sales prices aren't available yet.

On the outer edges of the Tenderloin, The Extra heard about Career Resource Development Center's plan to demolish its 655 Geary facility and erect a 13-story building with condominiums, and office and retail space. We were unable to reach CRDC to confirm the project status.

Even the old Fox Plaza — now Archstone Fox Plaza — is getting into the condo act, though not with the 446 apartments in the existing tower. Owners Grubb & Ellis have an investment offering on its Web site: It would like to sell the 215,000 square feet of office space in the tower plus the site next door, currently a U.S. Post Office, Starbucks, Patrick & Co. stationers and second-floor offices. The idea would be to replace the low structure with a new 12-story tower with 231 residential condominiums. Grubb & Ellis agent Daniel Cressman said no one has bitten yet.

Across the street, at 1 Polk, construction is under way on 179 condos, all but 11 of them market-rate. Andrew Stringer, local project director with Australia-based Anka Property Group, says the 210-foot-tall building is expected to be ready to occupy in September 2008. One-bedroom units average 800 square feet and two-bedrooms 1,300 square feet. Sales prices won't be announced until this summer, when marketing starts, Stringer said.

The 22-story SoMa Grand, at 1160 Mission next to the new Federal Building, opened its sales office March 1, looking for buyers of its 246 condos. Owners and operators are AGI Capital Group, TMG Partners and Joie de Vivre Hospitality. Sales prices range from \$500,000 junior one-bedrooms to more than \$1 million for three-bedroom, two-bath units. ■

An open loft, top, provides extra storage in a 250-square-foot studio. One-bedroom, bottom left, and first-floor gym, right, make the most of tight spaces.