

## **SPECIAL ISSUE: CONDOS, LOFTS AND TOWNHOMES**

### **Hassle-free living**

Condos and the like offer easy lifestyle, convenience

By C.W. Cameron

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If you think you're seeing more and more condos, townhomes and lofts these days, you're right. A style of home that was once limited to the city core is now spreading out to the suburbs and exurbs as more and more home buyers are looking for an easy, maintenance-free lifestyle. If you value your free time and want to do something other than maintaining a yard and taking care of a house, a condo, townhome or loft may be just right for you, too.

And you're not alone. The building boom for this kind of housing continues. At the end of the first quarter of 2008, Atlanta had 7,100 new or under-construction condo units and 7,500 new or under-construction townhome units available for sale. Of these, 175 were lofts, according to Metrostudy figures for the 22-county metro Atlanta region.

"Many home buyers today are looking for a place where they can come home from work, park their car and be able to walk to whatever they want to do," said Brad Horner, president of Coldwell Banker The Condo Store. "It's not just young people buying these homes. We're seeing empty nesters and baby boomers all looking for this lifestyle."

"Atlanta is unique," says Chris Burke of the Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association. "There's no centralized job center here. There's downtown, Buckhead, Alpharetta — and the people working in those centers don't necessarily want a single-family detached house. That's a trend that's going to be continuing. With rising land costs everywhere, it just makes sense for both builders and homeowners."

The new condos and townhomes are being designed and developed to suit the needs of this changing market. Horner says, "We're marketing homes with larger square footage and more outdoor spaces. At Meeting Park, for example, near the square in Marietta, there are rooftop terraces ideal for container gardening for those residents who left their yard behind."

Another trend Horner sees is a big emphasis on kitchens and baths. "The design trends that start in single-family homes are all here — eclectic kitchens with countertops that combine different materials and cabinets that are more furniturelike and in a mixture of woods. Advances in technology are big, too, with units being prewired for wireless capabilities, surround sound, computer docking stations and designated iPod stations. And we're seeing a big emphasis on green, with environmentally friendly materials and energy-efficient appliances all part of the package."

So, what's the difference between a loft, a condo and a townhome? Horner says, "In a condominium, you own 100 percent of the space within the walls of your unit and a percentage

of the common elements like hallways, parking and amenities. Townhomes and lofts can be more a description of style. Townhomes share common side walls and are multi-level while lofts have a more open floor plan and are somewhat edgier in style. They may both be condominiums . . . but many townhomes are fee simple and you own the land below your home." So if your condo roof needs repair, the homeowners' association will take care of it. If your fee-simple townhome roof is leaking, it's your responsibility.

Horner says, "The loft movement in Atlanta started with the renovation of some of the historic old buildings in the Castleberry Hill neighborhood as well as the Stacks, developed out of the old Fulton Cotton Mill in Cabbagetown. Many younger buyers are drawn to lofts, but they also appeal to older buyers who are interested in them for their spacious feel and unique characteristics."

Life is good on the 12th floor in Buckhead

Angel and Faith Ramos, both 27, were renting in Woodstock and were ready to move into town. Faith is a nurse at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, and Angel is a real estate agent with Sotheby's International Realty. They wanted to be closer to their jobs.

"We had been looking for about a month when we came to the Paramount at Buckhead," Faith says. "We made our decision as soon as we walked in. We realized we could have the lifestyle here we wanted but never dreamed we could have it at this price."

Their condo: They're on the 12th floor. The one-bedroom, one-bath unit has a view overlooking Buckhead. "We didn't have to do any upgrades," says Angel. "The unit came with slate flooring, granite countertops and stainless-steel appliances. We have a separate living room and dining room and both share the great city skyline view." There are little touches like a laundry room, nook for a computer and a custom-built walk-in closet.

Amenities, amenities, amenities: "There are two theaters, a gorgeous pool, a concierge, fitness center and valet parking. We're both from New York and we feel like we got a million-dollar condo at a bargain price," says Angel. "In our two months here we've gotten spoiled. We laugh and say that when we have a kid we're just going to have to buy another unit in the building. They bring up your groceries, you can send your clothes to the laundry, there's a coffee bar, anything you need you can have in this building. If we bought a single-family house, we'd have to do it all ourselves."

The neighbors: "Some buildings have a reputation as 'party hearty' buildings, and we didn't want that. We've got a great mix of people here, from young professionals to a sophisticated older crowd. It's a great mix of successful people, and that's what we wanted to be surrounded by," says Angel. Faith adds, "There are always events to meet the neighbors — cooking classes, catered dinners. We love it here."

## **AT A GLANCE**

Paramount at Buckhead

Address: 3445 Stratford Road N.E., Atlanta

County: Fulton

Information: 404-816-2929; [www.paramountatlanta.com](http://www.paramountatlanta.com)

Price range: \$197,900-\$600,000s

Year built: 2006

Standard features: 10-foot coffered ceilings, oversize windows, luxury finishes and breathtaking city views

Amenities: ocean-style resort pool and sundeck with poolside towel service, private cabanas with flat-screen TVs, platform beds and conversation coves, outdoor catering kitchen, tennis court, open-air theater, indoor movie theater, fitness and cardio facilities, wine cellar, e-lounge, covered gated parking, controlled access to the building, wireless availability, demonstration kitchen and dining room, conference room, media library with computer services

Services: valet, 24-hour front desk attendant, resident services director, spa services director, gourmet coffee bar, daily newspaper service in the library, dry cleaning, car detailing services, tennis lessons, personal training, interior design program, package delivery, community porter, event planning services for residents

Number of units: 300

Square footage: 880 to 1,868 square feet

Association fee: 30 cents per square foot, covers liability insurance, building maintenance, pest control, garbage, valet parking

Broker: Sales and marketing are handled exclusively by the Marketing Directors

Builder: Julian LeCraw & Co., LLC

Schools: Sarah Smith Elementary, Sutton Middle, North Atlanta High

Directions from downtown Atlanta: Take I-75/85 north to I-85 north. Take Exit 87 (Ga. 400 N.). Take Exit 2 (Lenox Road) and turn right. At Peachtree Road turn right. Turn right at Stratford Road. Paramount Buckhead will be on your right.

Couple happy to leave yardwork behind

One year ago, Lee and Deborah Howard and their dogs, McKenzie and Zoe, moved from their Peachtree Corners two-story home with basement to a townhome at Seven Norcross.

"One of the things Deborah worried about was giving up the yard, but the community was named for the seven parks that will be surrounding it, and we love it here. I think 100 percent of the people at Seven have dogs, and we're all out walking them all the time. The dogs love it, and they've lost 5 pounds because they're not sitting around in the backyard but out there walking," says Lee with a laugh.

Their townhome: They bought a three-bedroom, three-bath unit with 2,780 square feet. "The garage is in the back, so we really have front-porch living. No cars to look at and people have bistro tables and chairs out front. Everyone stops to talk. We put in an elevator, too, so stairs wouldn't become an issue. The space is perfect for entertaining. In fact, we've already

entertained more in one year here than we did in 20 years in our home in Peachtree Corners," says Lee, 57, region manager for Fosters Wine Estates.

No more yardwork: "Yardwork was getting to be a beast. I just took up golf, and now I drive past my old neighbors laying out pine straw on a Saturday morning while I've got my clubs in the back. It's like a dream come true. We sold our house in three weeks, and although Deborah was reluctant at first, now she's like an ambassador for the community. I don't think I could get her to move again if I won the Lotto."

Walking distance to everything and an office upstairs: "We love the ambience of downtown Norcross. We're literally 100 yards to the closest restaurant and within 100 yards from there are five more. I work out of my office on the top floor where we also have a roof deck [with] a small grill and a small gas outdoor fireplace. We're four floors up, so we overlook downtown Norcross.

Connected to the neighbors: "When we lived in our subdivision, we were on a cul-de-sac and only had two houses near us. And those were the only neighbors we saw. Here we all watch out for each other. It's ultra cool, like being in college again. I feel like a college kid again, I just don't look like one," Lee jokes.

## **AT A GLANCE**

Seven Norcross

Address: Corner of Thrasher Street and Autry Street, Norcross

County: Gwinnett

Information: 678-969-9500; [www.hedgewoodhomes.com](http://www.hedgewoodhomes.com)

Price range: High \$200,000s-\$600,000

Year built: 2006

Standard features: Earthcraft-certified, granite, hardwood floors, stainless-steel appliances

Amenities: Seven parks, including a pool

Number of units: 150

Square footage: 2,300 to 3,100 square feet

Association fee: \$2,435/year; covers roof reserve, exterior maintenance, pool, landscaping, termite bond

Broker: Hedgewood Realty

Builder: Hedgewood Homes

Schools: Susan Stripling Elementary, Summerour Middle, Norcross High

Directions from downtown Atlanta: Take I-85 north to Exit 99 (Jimmy Carter Blvd.). Turn left on Jimmy Carter, then right on W. Peachtree Street. Turn right on Thrasher Street. Community is on the right.

## Urban loft a part-time retreat from country

Anda Olsen and John Barmeyer are making a big change. They've bought 11 acres in Pickens County, but they couldn't bear to lose their connection to Atlanta. "We love Inman Park," says Anda. "We've been living in the neighborhood for many years. We bought our loft in the Grinnell so we could pop into Atlanta a few days each week to catch a Braves game, go to Chastain, have dinner with friends." John laughs and adds, "We're keeping an edgy urban toehold in the city."

Their loft: "We were sold on how spacious it is," says Anda. "I've got lots of stuff, and I like my stuff," she laughs. The couple bought a 1,650-square-foot unit. "It was the biggest we could find without having to combine two units. We've got two bedrooms and two baths, a little den area, garage underneath, a graceful entry and a large living area. The double pocket doors to the adjoining bedroom and the huge windows make the space feel enormous. We have lots of light," says Anda. "It's a very serene space, and if you go out onto our balcony you're overlooking the Beltline."

Low maintenance: "We didn't want a townhome and we didn't want stairs. We didn't want anything to maintain. This is something we can walk away from," says John. "There are two maintenance guys on staff, which is fabulous."

Loft living: "John and I have lived in a couple of lofts, and we like the openness. You can live larger in a loft because you're not constricted by the boundaries of traditional rooms. Everything feels bigger to me here," says Anda. John adds, "We're assuming 10-15 years from now there'll be trains coming through on the Beltline and lots of other activity. There's lots of urban bustle and vibrancy now and there'll be even more when the Beltline starts to be developed."

### **AT A GLANCE**

Grinnell

Address: 200 N. Highland Avenue, Atlanta

County: Fulton

Information: 404-420-8577; [www.grinnellatl.com](http://www.grinnellatl.com)

Price range: From the \$250,000s

Year built: 2008

Standard features: Bosch appliances, Kohler & Hansgrohe Fixtures

Amenities: spacious rooftop sundeck, access to contemporary pool and fitness center, onsite restaurants and retailers, walk to local shops and cafes

Number of units: 24

Square footage: 1,045 to 1,755 square feet

Association fee: 22 cents per square foot; covers exterior maintenance, liability, trash, gas, landscaping, property management fees, termite bond on building, pool and fitness

Broker: Coldwell Banker The Condo Store

Builder: Perennial Properties

Schools: Mary Lin Elementary, Inman Middle, Grady High

Directions from downtown Atlanta: Take I-75/85 to Exit 248C (Freedom Parkway, Ga. 10E). Turn left onto Boulevard, then right onto Highland Avenue. Building is on the left in approximately one mile.