

HOW RICHMOND LIVES

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Manchester Makeover

Warehouse condo capitalizes on historic appeal and big-city views

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Call Bill Chapman, president of Fountainhead Development, the head cheerleader for Manchester. Not only did he restore and renovate a four-story warehouse in the old Richmond neighborhood, he made his home in one of the buildings' three residential condos. He also conducts tours for out-of-towners from his rooftop deck.

When a limited liability company purchased a group of warehouse buildings from MeadWestvaco in 2003, the properties were divided into three parcels — one became Plant Zero, one became Art Works, and the third became three residential and two commercial condominiums. Chapman and two partners — Robyn Brickner-Connell and Frederic Cox — were the developers of this third parcel. Chapman also acted as project manager, so he got first picks on condos. He opted for the 3,400-square-foot unit that he says offers the best city views. Brickner-Connell purchased the 4,200-square-foot one next door. The third unit and the commercial space are also occupied.

Preserving Character

Because the building is zoned for residential condos, the developers were required to provide two parking spaces per unit. However, there was no on-street parking, and the building has zero lot lines on each side. Chapman and his partners wanted interior parking, but because they were taking advantage of the state's rehabilitation tax credit program, they had to work closely with the Department of Historic Resources on any structural changes they wanted to make to the building.

“We restored or replaced 960 window panes on the back of the building itself, so the Department of Historic Resources saw what we were willing to do to keep the historical integrity of this 1919 warehouse building intact,” Chapman says. “I think that’s part of the reason they allowed us to create an indoor parking area and put in the garage door.”

The three residential condo owners have garage door openers to the first-floor communal garage, and all have entrances from the garage to their respective units. Two of the three have elevators to their condos. Chapman opted for stairs instead.

“It’s a bit of a sore point for my wife,” Chapman says, “especially on grocery shopping days.”

Overall, however, Chapman was amazed at how quickly and easily the project came together. Construction on the building began in February 2004 and was completed in June 2005. He and his wife, Mary Ann Rodriguez-Chapman, moved in the following month.

“This was my first job acting as general contractor,” Chapman says. “There were a lot of pleasant surprises like the hardwood floors. It’s hard to believe they used bird’s-eye maple for a warehouse floor. Also, there is a tremendous view of the downtown skyline from the rooftop deck.”

The condo is spread out over four floors with the garage on the first floor, bedrooms and office on the second, and a main living area on the third. A column divides the main living area into quadrants that include a living room, dining room, rec room and kitchen. The fourth floor opens to the rooftop deck.

Design Details

The one stumbling block to the entire renovation project was the kitchen. While many condo developments use standard kitchen design plans and appliances, the three kitchens in these condos are all highly customized and were therefore labor-intensive. The first contractor for the Chapman’s kitchen fell through.

“We ended up using Jed Perago with Square Foot Design, who is very talented in casework and design, but it still took him about 12 weeks to come up with a new design for the kitchen,” Chapman says. Sean Paige, who co-owns Square Foot Design with Perago, says the first step was to take stock of the materials already purchased. Then, with interior designer Chris McCray, they came up with a design.

“The kitchen has Silestone quartz counters, Wengé wood cabinetry, stainless steel appliances and a Starfire glass backsplash,” Paige says. “The upper cabinets are an automotive white with a lacquer finish and clear coat on top.”

Expanko cork flooring and a Grohe faucet add to the contemporary, clean look. McCray found the Futuro Futuro cylindrical hood online to top off the Viking stove.

The dining and living areas are divided by a fireplace wall that Chapman designed to be made of stone, but he was advised against it when former roommate and structural engineer Greg Frederick of Architectural Outfitters weighed in on the project.

“Because the design called for a ton or couple of tons worth of stone, there was a risk involved,” Frederick says. “The floor wasn’t structurally engineered for that.”

Instead, McCray suggested that the fireplace surround be made of inexpensive fiberboard cut into blocks to look like stone. “This is one of the most successful things I’ve done,” McCray says. “It gives the space a sense of permanence and mass.”

Facing exposed brick walls in the living and dining rooms, the juxtaposition works. The faux stone wall ends with a see-through fireplace.

“Bill is educated in design, and he knows what he likes,” McCray says. “We spent a lot of time just on paint finishes. We painted the beams in the ceiling white and painted the walls in warm tones. The accent walls in the living room are brown and face the dark gray tones on the fireplace surround. The dining room is a rich burgundy color. We just saturated the space with warm colors.”

Frederick’s company installed the molding, custom woodwork and architectural millwork on the baseboards and door casings throughout the condo. H. Beckstoffer’s Sons in Richmond milled the iron railings for the dramatic staircase, and Architectural Outfitters finished and installed the railings and maple stair treads.

“It was not a forgiving installation,” Frederick says. “There was no structure there other than metal beams, so it was precarious to balance on a metal beam, remove the temporary stair treads and put in new ones.”

Frederick also installed about 30 feet of Kirei architectural panels that adorn the wall starting at the stairway landing between the second and third floors and going to the top of the ceiling on the fourth floor. Made of sorghum, the environmentally friendly panels were bought from Anthony Brozna at Eco Supply Center. “Sorghum is a cereal grass that has lots of texture and color to it,” Frederick says. “We spent a

week milling and installing the panels.”

Furnishings throughout the home are mostly contemporary. The dining table and buffet were purchased at La Différence, as was the Natuzzi sofa in the living room. A torchiere and a floor vase in the living room came from Ligne Roset in the Georgetown Design District’s Cady’s Alley. An interesting wall sculpture above the sectional sofa called Thicket was done by Sue Papa, wife of Tom Papa, one of Chapman’s partners in Fountainhead Development.

A couple of pieces were found at the Architectural Design Show in New York. Still other pieces came from China courtesy of McCray. “I was designing a showroom for a factory in Nimbo, China, which is an area known for antiques,” McCray says. “The prices were so low that my client aided me in purchasing and shipping a 40-foot container of handpicked antiques.”

McCray selected some pieces he thought worked for the Chapmans. He set them up and said, “If you like it, keep it.” The couple only sent a few things back.

The second floor of the house where the three bedrooms and office are located has a decidedly Zen feel. A subtle tree-patterned Cole & Son wallcovering conveys a sense of peacefulness to the square center hallway that the Chapmans refer to as “the meditation room.” Here, McCray turned an existing support column into a beautiful work of art by creating a fountain made from walnut. Water quietly trickles down and over gray smooth stones. Attached is a bench made of wood from a downed tree. From the meditation room, three sliding doors lead to the bedrooms. These are a modern adaptation of Japanese-style shoji doors and are made of walnut with a high-grade frosted Plexiglas. Also from this space are stairs that lead down to the front door, situated catty-cornered on the building at Third and Decatur streets.

The master bedroom features a sleigh bed and traditional furnishings as well as a huge hand-painted vase and Ming-style horseshoe chair from China via the McCray shipment. Impressive in size and beauty is the walk-in closet that Rodriguez-Chapman concedes makes up for the missing elevator. Brazilian hardwood scraps from the roof deck were used to build a vanity and built-in drawers and cabinets.

Sliding doors made of bamboo lead to the bath. A shower is made special by a Kohler faucet, which is designed in such a way that water seems to come from a hole in the ceiling. His and her vessel-bowl basins, bamboo cabinetry and Silestone quartz counters add to the “wow” factor here.

The ultimate wow, however, is the couple’s view from the fourth-floor, rooftop deck. Outdoor furniture is arranged to take in the sights. Chapman serves on the board of Venture Richmond — the organization formed by the merging of Richmond Renaissance, Riverfront Development Corp., River District Alliance and citycelebrations — and gladly invites visitors and newcomers to see the city from this spectacular vantage point.

From here you can see the Overlook condos in Oregon Hill, the spires of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart and the Landmark Theater in the Fan, the Jefferson Hotel, Ethyl Corporation, Main Street Station, Libbie Park in Church Hill, and, of course, the Federal Reserve building, Riverfront Towers and other buildings dotting the downtown skyline.

“For a condominium loft, they have the best views in the city,” McCray says. “I think time will tell that the property will be worth a lot more than they’ve put into it.”