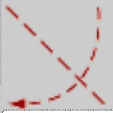


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Virtual Showrooms

by *Linda Jarrett*

Need a change of scenery? Boot up, log on, sit back and tour some of the most elegant digs in the St. Louis area from the comfort of your computer chair.

Conrad Properties and joint developers MLP Investments and FRAMAmerica have taken real estate to a higher level by using virtual showrooms and web sites to sell their product – luxury suites and condominiums.

The Fountain Place Preview Center, 7520 Forsythe, features a virtual tour of Fountain Place, a \$100 million, 150-suite luxury high-rise condominium under construction in Clayton. The tour takes visitors through the Skyclub with its view of the surrounding St. Louis area, and then through each type of suite offered in the building. A 12-foot model of the building lets you see the exterior details that will identify the 29-story building, which, after it rises east of Hanley Road in Carondelet Plaze across from the Ritz Carlton, will be among the tallest in the area. The estimated completion date for the tower is in mid-2002.

In Conrad Living's virtual showroom at 165 N. Meramec, prospective buyers can see three models of kitchens and bathrooms from the Loft developments. They are then taken on a virtual tour of each of the firm's three condominium developments and its hotel/luxury apartment building, room by room. They also see what is available in the area in the way of shops, restaurants, parks and other attractions.

Conrad Living is a subsidiary of Conrad Properties Association. The hotel/apartment is the furthest along of the four projects. Called Clayton on the Park, it is under construction at 8025 Bonhomme Ave., and scheduled for completion in June.

Cliff Bowman, president of Bowman International Project Marketing, the Vancouver-based firm responsible for the internet and virtual showroom Marketing and Sales Program of Fountain Place, said the response to virtual tours has been "fantastic."

"We're the leader in using virtual technology and spend most of our time doing virtual tours where we use the Internet" he said. "It gives people an advanced preview of the project prior to it's being built."

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Bowman said his company doesn't outfit model suites anymore. "We found in the past that when you build a model suite, you always sell out, then you're apologizing because you have nothing left to show. We build a vignette of a kitchen and bathroom section, then we do virtual tours of all our suites and most people can judge the value and relate how great kitchen cabinets are."

Bob Sauer, president of Conrad Properties Association, said their biggest problem was communicating to people what they could presell. "We were fascinated with this virtual reality technique as a way to communicate ideas."

Conrad Living's other projects are Summit Lofts on the Square, on Emerson and Decker Lane in Creve Coeur, Hi Pointe Lofts, 6350 and 6340 Clayton Rd., and The Monaco on Maryland. Estimated completion dates for Hi Pointe Lofts is spring 2001, for the Summit Lofts, summer 2001, with the Monaco estimated in summer 2002.

"We're marketing a lot of different developments, and also the concept of living in Clayton or another urban environment," said Sauer.

Fountain Place web site visitors can click the mouse and see a 360-degree panoramic view from the Skyclub at the top of the building. Another click tells them about such attractions as the Gateway Arch, Laclede's Landing, the St. Louis Art Museum and St. Louis Zoo. Other sites will take them on virtual tours of the entire building and various suites.

Bowman said they promote the web site since 25 percent of their buyers are either from out of town or out-state. "People moving into this area can log onto our website and they see what St. Louis is all about. It's an economic development [brochure] about St. Louis and we have the ability to do a virtual tour of existing amenities like restaurants, theaters and parks from the comfort of your home."

Both companies believe the time is ripe for selling a lifestyle change. Modern day stress and long commutes are changing the face of housing.

Sauer said: "You have a population of people in their late 40s who have had the suburban homes, the kids have left and they're at the point where they may have some wealth. They don't want the big home. This market cuts broadly across age groups. While there's always been a market for the over-75 group, younger groups want this type of change. They want to be able to walk out the door and go to a restaurant or shop."

Bowman said this type of arrangement appeals to two age groups – the urban couple of 45-55 still involved with work and those 55 to 80 who like to travel and may still be involved with work to some extent.

"It's a national trend. A lot of cities saw a flight to the suburbs, but because of traffic and congestion, many cities are strengthening programs to reincarnate downtown. Commutes drive people nuts. Also, people are fed up with managing a house. They want to be carefree. We're selling a

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up with managing a house. They want to be parents. We're selling a lifestyle."

Growing highway congestion also has prompted many people to find a way to work from home. Both companies have taken this into consideration with their building plans.

Bowman said, "The Internet technology in these building are far superior to anything office buildings have. They are fiber optically wired so you can work from home. The advent of the computer has changed very dramatically how people will work and live in the future."

He said they had just finished a project in Seattle and have projects in Dallas and Toronto, and are using virtual tours in a Miami project. "The response has been fantastic. Seattle had over a million hits on their website in five months. We usually sell 50 percent of the building out in five months, sometimes faster. Toronto sold 357 suites in three weeks."

Cliff Drozda, the Fountain Place's project director of sales and marketing, believes that downtown St. Louis is ripe for this type of revitalization. "I have seen this happen in other places. Once the groundwork is laid, change starts to come. It might be slow, but it's coming."

Fountain Place suites will range from \$400,000 to \$3.5 million for the penthouses. Hi Pointe Loft, prices go from \$225,000 to \$600,000, the Summit Loft from \$250,000 to 500,000 and the Monaco from \$500,000 to \$2.5 million.

And you can do this from the comfort of your computer! Visit [Fountain Place](#) and [Conrad Living](#).

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