



Photography by Randall Benton / rbenton@sacbee.com

Welcome to the Sutter Brownstones, one of the many new developments that are designed to lure suburbanites back into the city.

URB APPEAL

The new brownstones, lofts, townhomes and condos bring big city design to Sacramento's urban core



The common area between the buildings that make up the Sutter Brownstones is a place for neighbors to meet and relax.

By Leigh Grogan
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Looking at the details of the new Sutter Brownstones, you could see yourself in Brooklyn.

But, step back, and your sights are set on midtown Sacramento.

It's where suburbanites become urbanites.

Trading cars for bikes, walking for a jug of milk.

And midtown is where Sacramento's Loftworks design group's newest urban-living experience has taken shape.

But, as partner Glenn Sorensen says, "You could pick up these brownstones and put them down in any urban city."

Home is N Street (between 26th and 27th streets), tucked into 30,000 square feet of space – four rows with 28 homes and two shared courtyards, plus parking.

Indeed, the Sutter Brownstones demonstrate how smart, aesthetic housing can work in a clearly defined historical section of Sacramento.

Serving also as tour guide, developer Mark Friedman says the design is a different approach to the traditional brownstone you might see in New York.

"Even though I'm a committed modernist, we knew we were building in a historic neighborhood filled with Victorians and people who have lived here a long time," Friedman says.

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Brownstones: Developer wanted them to fit in

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"We wanted living spaces that would be true to the design intent, but fit in with what's already here."

From the street, the Sutter Brownstones look like they could have been part of the landscape for longer than the three years it took to complete the project. (Brick has that special way of connecting with generations of design.)

Of the 28 homes, which range in price from \$370,000 to \$625,000, four have "granny flats," or accessory dwelling units, which are on the lower level facing N Street.

"Because they have complete kitchens and bathrooms (and separate entrances), you could use them as rental units or for relatives," he says.

(Friedman and Sorensen are joined by Mike Heller in this project, along with the principals of Walsh Construction in Portland. Their company, Loftworks, was formed in 2001. Their urban core developments include the Elliott Building and 01 Lofts.)

The Sutter Brownstones range in size from 1,200 square feet (two floor plans), 1,700 square feet up to 2,000 square feet (with the granny flat).

Sorensen adds, "We built the brownstones at a 'human scale.' They're no more than five stories high, like the historic homes along the canals in Amsterdam."

One of the Sutter Brownstones' new residents is Bruce Starkweather, chairman of Lioniak Beaumont Design Group in Sacramento.

Coming from an architectural background, Starkweather says he and his wife are typical empty-nesters, who are selling their "beautiful 1927 money pit in east Sac."

"It's a phase everybody talks about," he says. "Your kids are

grown, you're ready to downsize and move into a philosophy of mobility."

The Starkweathers looked at several options in the midtown area.

"They (Loftworks) just hit on the mark for us with the style, value and location," Starkweather says. "It's that modernist, edgy look we wanted."

Like the self-proclaimed "urban pioneers" they've become, the Starkweathers once lived in Loomis before moving to east Sacramento. Starkweather will continue to bike to work over on 19th Street and take advantage of his new neighborhood's amenities, including a variety of restaurants, shopping destinations and entertainment options.

Of course, they'll be bringing personal possessions, including an eclectic mix of contemporary looks along with family heirlooms.

"We'll be outfitting our brownstone with our most precious things," he says.

"It will be sweet if the kids want some things. Otherwise, we'll have one hell of a garage sale."

Step inside the Sutter Brownstones, and it's easy to see that Loftworks' design will attract empty-nesters, young professionals and even families.

The use of space is creative and, if you're a home cook or into entertaining, the kitchen/dining areas are fully appointed. Some with islands, all with high-end appliances.

And there's room for a home office and entertainment center.

Are you a StairMaster fan? Then get those endorphins going because everywhere you look—inside and out—there are stairs.

Curtis Popp of blankblank, a Sacramento design firm, took charge of the living areas. That includes the cabinetry, faucets,



Developers Mark Friedman, left, and Glenn Sorensen discuss their vision of urban living in the kitchen of one of the Sutter Brownstones.

Photography by Randall Benton / rbenton@facbee.com

knobs, paint color, bathroom sinks and appliances.

Call him the project's "interior architect."

His mandate? "Create a hybrid of old and new ideas, something up-to-date in a modern space."

"That's how you make a statement in a small but powerful way."

Here are several of Popp's creative touches:

- Kitchen faucets and sinks are wall-mounted, with a soap-dish holder on top. "I have one like it," Popp says. "It's reminiscent of Grandma's laundry room."

- Mixtures of either teak or granite in the kitchens where the spaces between the fridge and cabinets are seamless. Appliances are counter depth.

- Bertazzoni Italian gas ranges, which are relatively new to the U.S. market (and, Popp says, about half the cost of a Viking or Wolf).

- Popp opted for muted tones for the paint. One color he chose is Belgian Black (a defunct color from the Martha Stewart Living

Walking tour

A 30-minute walk from the Sutter Brownstones will take you to Capitol Park if you head west into east Sac's shopping district if you head east. Along the way, there's shopping for everything from sandals and stilletos to vintage apparel. Salons are easy to find. Entertain yourself at midtown's Second Saturday events. The new B Street Theatre (set to open in 2010) will be a block away. Hungry? Choices range from dinner (Biba) to breakfast (Cornerstone) and everything in between.



collection), which he had recreated.

"The key (for me) was to paint with a broad stroke," Popp adds. "That way, the homeowner can do whatever they like in terms of art, furniture, fixtures—no from any era—because it will fit."

Outside, the two courtyards fit the brownstone lifestyle. You can set up a table and chairs for a Saturday night dinner or reading the newspaper with coffee on Sunday morning.

Yes, you'll be giving up a modicum of backyard privacy, but the courtyards are raised in certain areas to distinguish between private and public areas.

There are fountains, a nice mix of foliage, and the ability to come and go as you please.

The homeowners' association takes care of landscaping.

"What we're trying to do in Sacramento is allow folks to

have the creature comforts in a more environmentally, sustainable way," Friedman says.

"Fifty years of sprawl has shown that we can change land use and still go to work, the store and fun places without a car."

Of the 28 homes (including the four with granny flats), Loftworks has taken nonrefundable deposits for 10 units, with residents set to move in this month.

Popp, 37, who lives in Land Park with his wife and children, said he would consider eventually living in something even more urban than his own neighborhood.

"It encourages community, back when neighbors sat on their stoops and talked with each other," he says. "It's about walking everywhere."

Other loft and rowhouse projects are going up in downtown and midtown Sacramento. Tapistri Square and the Whiskey Hill Lofts also are targeting buyers who, as Popp says, have switched gears and "don't want to drive a half hour in their air-conditioned box."

"I think it's a great idea whose time is long overdue."

Call The Bee's Leigh Grogan, (916) 321-1129.



Although living in midtown offers a chance to experience some of Sacramento's best restaurants without getting into your car, the Sutter Brownstones have stylish, functional kitchens.