

# REAL ESTATE



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## English yew tree offers eternal life

Ancient species of conifer has a unique characteristic: It can regenerate. » **Page R14**

**The Examiner**

Your weekly guide to Washington-area homes

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Friday, November 2, 2007

## GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS



# Rewriting history

Once a segregated community, Shepherd Park now celebrates its diversity » **Page R8**



## CONDO CORNER

### District classic goes modern

Mount Vernon row house built around the turn of the 19th century combines a historic exterior with a sleek interior. » **Page R18**



## TOP PICK

### Size does matter: Cleveland Park home has heft

Four-level house on Macomb Street feels bigger than it looks, with a front addition in 1997 and rear expansion in 2004. » **Page R10**

## CONDO CORNER



- Courtesy photos

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# Another step back in time? Guess again

By Katie Wilmeth  
Special to The Examiner

In Washington, there is no shortage of historic buildings being revamped, refurbished or restored to their former glory. Meaning there's no shortage of houses with impressive interiors that make you feel as though you've stepped back in time.

But that's not the case with the Palermo, a grand turn-of-the-19th-century brick row house turned seven-unit condominium in the rapidly gentrifying Mount Vernon Triangle neighborhood. While the outside might have been painstakingly restored to its former glory, the inside is all this millennium.

Sleek lines with etched glass and aluminum as the main accents, top-of-the-line appliances and wired to the hilt, every unit comes complete with an iPort, which lets you connect an iPod to the pre-wired speaker system. The Palermo is a modern-day condo in a yesteryear shell.

"D.C. gives me the opportunity to work with historic properties," said Carina Lopez, the Palermo's architect. "But then I can also do all these new interiors. You can go back in time 100 years and then walk into the future."

The row house was constructed in 1890 by builder/architect Edward Woltz. The newly completed exterior restoration, by Washington firm Murillo/Malnati Group (MMG), includes two large bay windows on the first and second floors, an arched window above the front door, detailed columns on the third floor and two wrought-iron balconies.

Inside, with the exception of the original crown molding and high ceilings (both positive throwbacks to last century), each condo unit has a decidedly modern design. Every unit comes complete with bleached maple floors, recessed lighting, the aforementioned aluminum and etched glass design elements and an abundance of windows.

"It's an inviting feel," said Julio Murillo, founder and managing member of MMG. "We thought about how the light plays."

"Even our basement units don't feel like basement units," Lopez said. "I don't feel the need to have a wall when you can have a window."

Several of the units include walls of floor-to-ceiling windows, and two units feature the large bay windows from the original exterior.

Each of the seven units comes with its own special features. For example, three include private, gated courtyards (a rarity so close to

## AT A GLANCE

» **Property:** A 19th-century row-house-turned-condo building with 21st century amenities.

» **Price:** Units range from \$299,900 to \$1 million

» **Description:** Unique condos outfitted in a modern design with touches of the property's historic roots

» **Contact:** Alex Venditti, 202-550-8872, or Paul Pike, 202-550-8871, of Tutt, Taylor & Rankin, Sotheby's International Realty

downtown Washington), while some have garage parking. Other units include balconies or a den for extra living space.

The three-bedroom, 3.5-bath penthouse has been completely tricked out with a hot tub-accessorized roof deck and a second balcony running the length of the condo unit. Eighteen-foot ceilings in the living room and hot rock foot massagers on the shower floors finish the luxury living design. The 1,650-square-foot condo includes 1,000 square feet of outdoor space on the two decks and two parking spaces in the shared garage.

For those who want true privacy with their condominium, the carriage house, which is a separate building from the main house, was converted into the seventh unit. It, with the penthouse unit, is scheduled to be completed in late November.

Adding to the condo building's modern feel is its green design. MMG, which has converted multiple historic buildings into condominiums, built with an array of earth-friendly elements.

For example, instead of plywood, the firm used OSB board, which is made of recycled wood and is stronger than conventional plywood. Thermal windows reduce energy consumption and cut down on noise pollution, while pre-finished hardwood floors keep floor-finish fumes out of the condo units.

The Palermo, on M Street, is in an up-and-coming neighborhood. Minutes from the Washington Convention Center and the Mount Vernon Triangle Metro, the neighborhood is home to many local restaurants and will see a new Safeway in the spring.

The project turned out so well, said Lopez, that she's considering moving to the Palermo herself.

"I like the edginess of the neighborhood," she said. No doubt she likes the edginess of the Palermo too.