

It's a Lofty Life

Written by Story by Elizabeth Exline

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Sometimes loft living isn't about living above it all but amid it all.

Anyone who's ever been to Kierland Commons has at some point probably cast a curious eye up at its towering condominium complex. Whether it's done with envy (residents live at the mall!) or concern (residents live at the mall!) is not always clear, but one thing is certain: There's nothing else in town quite like it. Sure, there are other mid- and high-rise projects, many of them quite nice. There are condos a stone's throw from shopping centers, condos downtown and condos on various man-made waterfronts.

But, for the time being at least, there's only one luxury loft project set in the middle of a 38-acre development with shopping, restaurants and offices. For the owners of the 84 units in The Plaza Lofts at Kierland Commons, that fact translates to some unique opportunities. "What's really nice is taking the elevator down," explains homeowner Cliff Paul, principal and co-founder of the structural engineering firm PK Associates. "I can hop on the elevator and go down to pretty much anything I want." "Anything" might mean Jennifer Croll, he says, if he's running short on evening attire come Friday night; or Zinc Bistro if he's meeting up with friends. The potential scenarios seem endless.

Paul wasn't the only one to recognize the convenience of such a lifestyle. The first of The Plaza Lofts' two phases sold out in 30 days with little more than on-site advertising to recommend them. Residents of those 30 homes began moving in in 2005, and the second phase was completed this past spring. (The latter contains 54 units ranging from 1,100 to 2,800 square feet and the 3,300- to 3,900-sq.-ft. penthouse suites.) In addition to the usual lineup of amenities buyers have come to expect—private parking, a community room, a pool and whirlpool, an outdoor recreation area—The Plaza Lofts development incorporates thoughtful touches in individual units. Stackable sliding glass doors, for example, separate the private terraces from the homes, and niceties like oversize bathtubs and walk-in closets help soften the transition away from single-family dwelling.

Such was the case, anyway, for Paul, who bought his two-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom unit in 2005. Coming from a single-family home and a dissolved marriage, Paul was looking for something modestly sized, convenient and all his own. "[My company] did the structural engineering on it," he says of his selection process. "I knew it was coming up, and I thought it would be a great project and a great location, so that's why I [bought] it."

Chalk it up to Paul's engineering experience or familiarity with the project, but he selected one of the most engaging areas of the complex in which to live. His loft is accessed through a private courtyard where front "porches" are outlined in pavers outside each unit's front door. Traditional corridor access appears elsewhere in The Plaza Lofts, but Paul's home declares itself different from the get-go.

Following through, however, is as important as making the positive first impression, and Paul's home does not disappoint. Walk through his front door, past the stairwell and into the common area with the kitchen, living room and dining room, and you'll meet with that enviable floor-to-ceiling glass that, here anyway, captures views of Pinnacle Peak and the McDowell Mountains. "It's bright," Paul says of his loft. "It's airy. I always have to have a view, and I loved the view of the mountains up north."

Paul also loved the upgraded finishes and features he selected, like the espresso-stained cabinetry with stainless hardware, Polar Blue Ice granite, light wood floors and custom, contemporary lighting from stores like Thingz in North Scottsdale. But it's his back patio that truly makes the loft feel like home. Outfitted with a fire pit, a barbecue and a spa, the only thing missing is turf, something few single men (or empty-nesters or part-time residents) want to deal with anyway. "Having the barbecue and the back patio is definitely a plus because very few units have that," explains Lexie Carlson, marketing director and sales executive for Sandra Wilken Luxury Properties. "So it definitely has a lot more of the amenities that people are looking for in a condo without having sacrificed space."

At 1,920 square feet, the loft does in fact afford enough room for a single occupant, but it's the airiness more than the dimensions that make it feel so expansive. In the living room, for example, the 11-foot ceiling suddenly shoots up to 23 feet by the window, thanks to the second story's abbreviated stretch. (It doesn't quite reach the back wall.) Upstairs, that space is the master bedroom and sitting room, which feels like a loft within a loft, thanks to the view outside and the balcony over the living room. From the bedroom, a corridor wraps around the master bathroom, overlooks the hallway below and meanders toward the office that Paul converted into a workout room.

Of course, to create a loft-like setting, one must play up the rawness of the space, as Paul did when he left the ceiling's corrugated steel exposed. "There are still even markings [on the beams] from when they built it," Paul notes. "I thought it added character."

The same went for furnishings. As the first home Paul decorated by himself and for himself, this loft represented a fresh start. "I sold everything I owned," he says, "every piece of furniture...and I started just basically from scratch." Using his preference for bright, primary colors like red,

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blue and yellow as a starting point, Paul shopped around places like Thingz and BoConcept to select pieces himself.

It's not so surprising then, that the coffee table's centerpiece is a big glass bowl of red and blue pens. This, Paul laughs, was born from his collect-all drawer where he'd toss his pens after work. One day, as he was sorting through it, he decided to turn his unintentional collection into a conversation piece that now comes in handy during the many parties and networking events he hosts. "Everybody wants to come here," he explains, "because it's a fun place." Take, for example, the party he hosted one summer when he suggested some friends get together at his house before descending into Kierland Commons to attend one of the summer concerts. "Nobody ever left my loft," he recalls good-humoredly. "Everybody stayed there until one in the morning. They just partied, and then they'd go out and watch the band from up on the balcony and then come back and party some more."

This, it seems, is part of the loft experience, a laidback lifestyle centered on good friends and good times. Paul has since moved back to a single-family home again, this time in Paradise Valley. He'll be remodeling it himself. ("I've always wanted to gut a house and remodel it," he admits.) But it's only a matter of time before the loft's next owner looks a little closer at those homes up in the sky during a Kierland outing and discovers for himself the allure of urban-meets-suburban dwelling.

To Learn More

For additional information about Cliff Paul's home at The Plaza Lofts at Kierland Commons, contact Sandra Wilken Luxury Properties at 480.596.0001 or info@sandrawilken.com. For details on The Plaza Lofts project, call 480.355.0207 or visit www.plazaloftskierland.com.