

## picture it

The Residences of 900 North Michigan Sales Center makes selling unbuilt condos a bit easier

By Sofia Galadza  
Photography by Scott Shigley

Designing a real estate sales office can be tricky. After all, think about it: it's a daunting task to create a space for selling homes that may not yet be built. How can one get a customer to make perhaps their greatest investment when they haven't even had the chance to try it on, so to speak? Some designers have been creative with photography, using true-to-size images of the views that could be expected; others have gone to great lengths to convey brands and lifestyles. When Steve Kadlec of Kadlec Architecture + Design in Chicago was enlisted to design the sales office for the luxe Residences of 900 North Michigan, several factors—including an ideal location—eased the task.

Urban Retail Properties is the developer for 900 North Michigan, a 66-story building designed by Kohn Pederson Fox Associates in the late 1980s. The mixed-use property includes a Bloomingdale's and other high-end retailers, the Four Seasons Hotel, and offices. When a tenant occupying eight levels (floors 21 to 29) of office space decided not to renew the lease, the developers made plans to transform them into 48 one-to-three-bedroom condominiums. They are slated to be complete in the fall of 2007.

Jaimie Bulla, vice president of development, brought Kadlec onto the team to design the interiors for the condos, assist with the development of the typical unit architectural finishes, and design the sales center. (Booth Hansen Associates served as the project architects, and Marvin Herman & Associates assisted them.) "We saw a model unit he did for a comparable building, and we liked it. He also had experience working with the Booth Hansen team," Bulla explains. Moreover, Kadlec's credentials include high-end residential interiors. In addition to specializing in corporate and retail interiors, Kadlec spent nine years at Gary Lee Partners as an associate and studio director for residential design before going on to start his own four-person firm in 2004.

The furnishings in the Sales Center (right) are luxurious, but they do not get in the way of showcasing amazing views, which was one of the client's goals.







Like several areas in the Sales Center, the model study (above) has a dual function: It is also used by the brokers and potential buyers as a resource room.

The client's request for the sales center was straightforward: to design a space that highlights the generous floor plans (thanks to the space's past life as an office), floor-to-ceiling windows that frame lake and city views, and sophisticated finishes and fixtures. Located on the 20th floor, the 3,100-sq.-ft. center already had the views and floor plate to give the potential buyer the actual experience of being in the unit. The next step was to plan and furnish it.

The center had to include a working office for the brokers. Rather than creating two separate areas, Kadlec's solution was to create a residential room design for each work area. The study doubles as a resource room, the library as a sales office. The coffee/pantry station was hidden within a built-in bar. And the reception desk, which was perhaps at the greatest risk of looking corporate, has a low profile and is clad in leather. Necessary storage units were built into walls behind the desk. "The key was to integrate office elements in a subtle way," remarks Kadlec.

An obvious feature of this project is that the space is not representative of an actual unit, but rather vignettes that would be typical in the finished product. Still, says Kadlec, it is unified because of a consistent palette, which includes dark wood flooring, espresso wood furnishings, and platinum and chocolate brown fabrics. Simple, clean-lined furniture was

used because it didn't detract from the views they were trying to emphasize. In general, says Kadlec, "the sales office was trying to appeal to a larger audience, blending modern and traditional aesthetics. It wasn't built to be an opinionated space."

Two areas where the team opted for exact replicas were with the kitchen and bathroom—twice over. Kadlec designed two kitchens and two baths to showcase the design possibilities. This decision to show more than one kitchen and bath is right in line with the goal to prove buyers will have options for varying tastes. "We wanted to demonstrate the breadth of design possibilities," says Bulla. The examples also are realistic. "What you see is a high level of finishes throughout that come standard," he says. Not only did they go all the way with building kitchens and baths instead of just showing renderings and samples, Kadlec says, "we were accurate in showing the options." What buyers saw were fixtures and finishes that weren't from some premium category that would end up costing more.

Bulla can't disclose the number of units that have been sold thus far, but he does affirm that brokers and buyers are impressed with the space. Indeed, it's a sales center that attracts, sparks ideas, and let's the buyers have a hand in the aesthetic of one sizable purchase. ■



*who*

*Project:* Residences at 900 North Michigan Avenue Sales Center. *Architect:* Booth Hansen Associates. *Consulting architects:* Marvin Herman & Associates. *Interior designer:* Kadlec Architecture & Design. *General contractor:* Pepper Construction. *Lighting designer:* Anne Kustner Lighting Design. *Photographer:* Scott Shigley.

*what*

*Paint:* Benjamin Moore. *Tile:* Stone Source. *Flooring:* Hones, Innovative Stone, Soltern. *Walls, countertops:* Innovative Stone. *Carpet:* Atelier Lapchi, Ruckstuhl. *Lighting:* Juno, Marion Jamieson, Christian Liaigre, Lightolier, Nessen, Ochre, Palmer Hargrave. *Doors:* Custom. *Window treatments:* Lutron Motorized Shades. *Seating:* Christian Liaigre, Donghia, Knoll, Estudio Furnishings, Custom. *Cabinets:* Snaidero. *Drapery fabric:* Coraggio Textiles, John Hutton Textiles, Tres Joli. *Upholstery:* Edelman Leather, Great Plains, Keleen Leather, Pollack. *Desks:* Promemoria, Custom. *Conference tables, credenza:* Custom. *Side tables:* Baker, Robert Kuo, Todd Hase, Richard Shapiro, Room and Board, Troscan, Custom. *Buffer:* Roman Thomas. *Wood screen:* Maxine Snider. *Plumbing fixtures:* Dornbracht, Kohler, Waterworks.

*where*

*Location:* Chicago, Ill. *Total floor area:* 3,100 sq. ft. *No. of floors:* 1.



One of two kitchens (top), built true-to-size, shows the standard, high-end finishes. Like the kitchen, the bathroom (above) is what a buyer can expect in a finished unit.