

NEW HOMES

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY 14, 2004

REAL ESTATE CLASSIFIED INSIDE AND ONLINE

CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM/HOMES



Sharon Stangenes
The house hunter

City sights, sounds stake Uptown claim

Ride the CTA Red Line—not a car—to the Lawrence Avenue stop and walk the scant couple of blocks to the busy intersection of Lawrence Avenue, Broadway and Racine in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood.

In a short stroll, you will see the venerable Aragon Ballroom, a Starbucks coffee shop and, in a building with some of the most elaborate baroque terra cotta you are likely to find in the city, a store with Afro-centric art. The Buddhist Temple of Chicago is just around the corner.

The Phoenix at Uptown Square, a mixed-use retail and residential development, which looks like a ship trapped by streams of car traffic, is smack in the middle of all this diversity, both ethnic and economic.

The complex, developed by Joseph Freed and Associates LLC, is aptly named. A wedge-shaped building, reportedly once a bank, is on the north end of the triangular block.

A five-story building in the middle of the block was a department store. The south end of the block was the site of the now-demolished Plymouth Hotel, a three-story building reputedly the haunt of such silent film stars as Gloria Swanson and Charlie Chaplin.

At one time, most of the block was a Goldblatt's department store which closed several years ago. The department store and bank buildings, along with a two-story addition on the site of the old hotel, now comprise The Phoenix.

But when plans were announced to redevelop the triangular block, the Phoenix became the centerpiece in a classic gentrification struggle.

Neighborhood activists opposed the complex fearing it would reduce the community's affordable housing. Supporters said it was needed to inject new life into a stagnant commercial district.

The developer agreed that 29 of the 37 loft condos would be sold at market rate and eight units would be sold to

PLEASE SEE HUNTER, PAGE 2

The Phoenix at Uptown Square



Photo for the Tribune by Margo Cohn

Address: 4715 N. Racine Ave.
Developer: Joseph Freed and Associates LLC
Phone: 773-862-0200 or www.josephfreed-homes.com

'New-home construction can affect whether the home is able to resist some indoor air quality problems related to the entry of pests, moisture or radon.'

— Bob Axelrad, EPA associate director, Indoor Environments Division

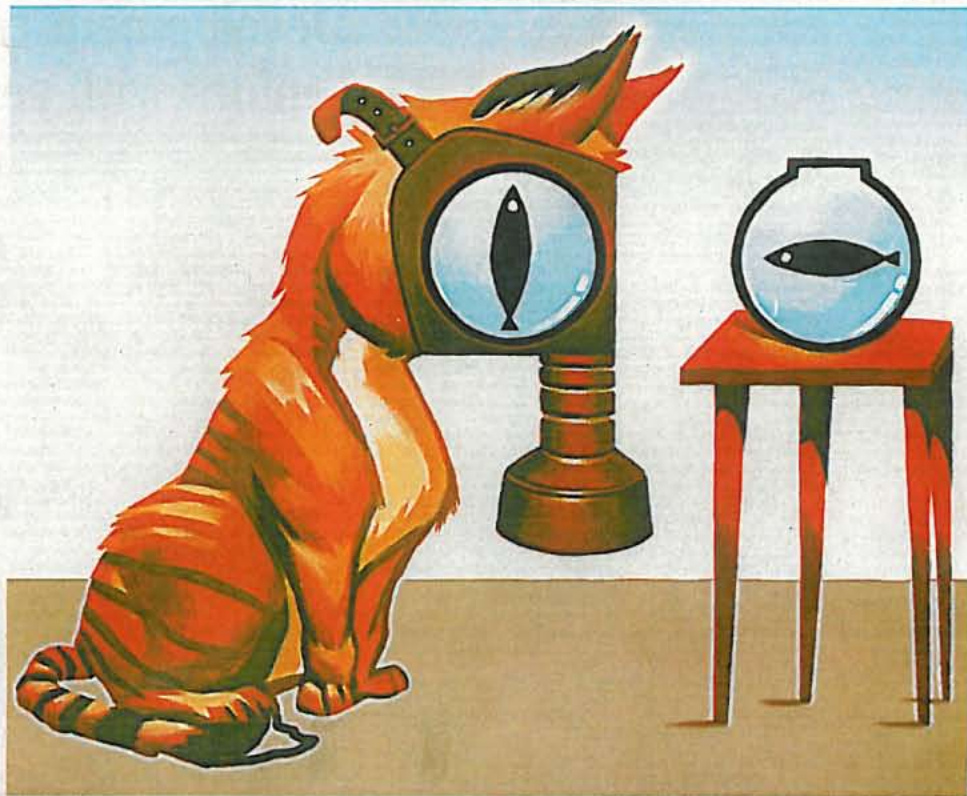


Illustration by Thomas Fuchs

Indoor air quality becomes an issue for home buyers

Breathing easier

By Chuck Green
Special to the Tribune

When some people move into a newly built home, they might be consumed with characteristics such as the layout of the floors or the size of the backyard.

But not Lisa and Willis Carter. Instead, when the Carters were selecting a new home, the clincher was something they hadn't thought of before: the quality of the air inside of the structure.

Their house is designed with an indoor air system including an air exchanger, which constantly replaces indoor air with outdoor air without compromising energy efficiency.

That was critical for the Carters, who bought a new home in West Chicago four years ago, because Willis Carter and his son,

Jordan, now 14, suffer from allergies and asthma.

"Even at the time we moved in, there was a lot of dust coming up from major construction around us. But compared to some of our neighbors, we didn't have near the dust intake," said Lisa Carter.

"My husband and son still get sick, but not for as long. We never thought about the indoor air before, but we feel a big difference here compared to where we used to live."

Indoor air pollution is hardly a minor problem.

Levels of air pollutants indoors can be two to five times higher and, in extreme instances, 100 times higher than outdoor levels, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Furthermore, the EPA says that indoor air pollution consistently ranks among the top four environmental risks to public health.

"New-home construction can affect whether the home is able to resist some indoor air quality problems related to the entry of pests, moisture, or radon," said Bob Axelrad, EPA associate director, Indoor Environments Division. "Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer, and moisture in homes can lead to mold problems."

Moisture can also help encourage dust mites, which affect some people with allergies and asthma, Axelrad noted.

In some houses built during the last 25 years, kitchen cabinets gave off large amounts of formaldehyde when they were installed. New carpeting emitted harmful chemicals.

In response, manufacturers have altered materials to emit fewer chemicals into a home. However, 85 percent of Americans

PLEASE SEE POLLUTION, PAGE 4

POLLUTION: Quality of air in a home is a big factor

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

don't know the air in their homes may be a health hazard, according to a study conducted in 1999 by the American Lung Association, through a grant from Honeywell Consumer Products.

A report from the National Academy of Sciences estimated that at least 15 percent of the population is sensitive to common chemicals in the home.

Frank Beasley, vice president of building science at Town and Country Homes in Chicago, believes the answer is almost as individual as a fingerprint.

"It differs from person to person, but if a homeowner or a child has any kind of allergies, they're going to be more concerned with indoor air quality," he said.

Furthermore, a number of builders might not be familiar with various indoor air systems in the market and, as a result, consumer awareness might not be all it could be, added Beasley.

"A lot of custom builders have been (working with indoor air systems) for awhile," said architect Al Bloom of Bloom and Fiorino Architects in Oak Brook.

Even so, he said, many home buyers lack an awareness of the need for indoor air quality.

"We're trying to educate builders and the public. It's a real educational challenge," added Axelrad.

"Obviously people with allergies would be very concerned (with improving indoor air), but younger buyers, for instance, who don't have a problem with allergies or asthma, might be less concerned, about indoor air," Bloom said.

The same goes for retirees like Larry Dawson, who admitted that quality indoor air didn't exactly rank high on his list when he and his wife moved into their newly built home, with an air exchanger, in North Aurora just over two years ago.

"It was sort of a throw-in. I'm like most people; I didn't even think about it. We bought the house because we liked the floor plan," he said.

The Dawsons, like the Car-

ters, also liked the fact that the interior of their home remained relatively free of the residue created by a home under construction next door.

"As long as we kept the windows closed, we never really got any dust. This house is considerably cleaner on the inside than (our other home was.) A friend of mine actually likes to come into our house because of its fresh smell," Dawson said.

Many home buyers harbor a somewhat casual attitude toward indoor air quality, said Perry Bigelow, owner of Bigelow Homes in Aurora.

"I'm looking at it from a production builder's perspective, but I don't think people pay much attention to indoor air. I think they're looking for the most house, square footage and

'In green buildings, builders try to use products that don't contain things like formaldehyde, arsenic or some of the glues and other materials that tend to exacerbate allergies.'

Architect Al Bloom

features they can afford," he said.

When Jeff and Kathleen Hornstein were deciding on a new home, they didn't exactly lose sleep over the importance of indoor air either. At the time, they didn't consider it much of an issue. But things changed.

"We compared several homes in the subdivision we wanted to be in, and indoor air wasn't anything that we were looking for initially. But once we started to compare each house, feature to feature, it seemed like there was more value in a home with (an air exchanger)," said Jeff Hornstein.

Hornstein moved into a new home in West Chicago about two years ago with wife Kathleen and their two children.

Armed with tools like the Internet, more consumers are getting to know about the importance of indoor air, said custom builder Dave Faganel, president of R.A. Faganel Builders in Batavia.

"People are coming in saying they have someone with asthma in their family; they're more

educated. Twenty years ago, people didn't think about it," he said.

Another thing Faganel believes homeowners should think about is the fact that homes are more tightly built than they were in the past. While he acknowledges that's great for energy conservation, it doesn't promote quality indoor air.

"Tighter homes are more energy efficient, but (when you build a tighter home), air gets trapped inside and the fresh air from the outside can't get in, so you also create a lot of indoor pollution problems," said Faganel.

"With an air exchanger, if there are any problems, they're taken care of because it constantly circulates new air into the house."

Bigelow says the key is how well a home is engineered.

"All houses today are reasonably tight," he said, but it's particularly important to have a fan that exhausts stale air from a home, nonstop.

"When you exhaust continuously, you are continually bringing in fresh air, constantly exchanging the air inside the house with fresh air from outside the house. That solves almost all problems of tightly built houses," he said.

Meantime, improved foams and plastics are helping to solve the problem of indoor air pollution, Beasley said.

"Carpets are much better today and formaldehyde is being pulled out of most of the products," he said. There has been a vast improvement in the particle board used for laminated counter tops, as well, Beasley said.

"There are some manufacturers trying to do a good job of lessening the amount of pollution that goes into a new house," home builder Bigelow said.

Architect Bloom said more builders are responding to consumer demand by designing homes that meet so-called green standards.

"In green buildings, builders try to use products that don't contain things like formaldehyde, arsenic or some of the glues and other materials that tend to exacerbate allergies," he said.

He said green architecture continues to gain in popularity.

Today, Lisa Carter is a strong advocate of the virtues of clean indoor air.

"For us, it has been wonderful," she said.