

MULTI-HOUSING NEWS

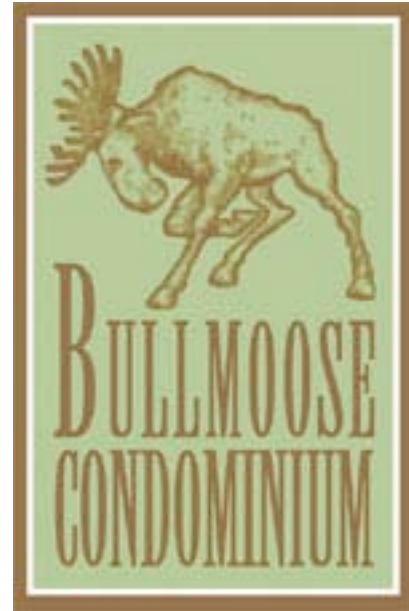
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What's in a Name?

By Teresa O'Dea Hein, Managing Editor

"A development's name has to tell a story," explains John Uzee, AIA, a principal with ADD Inc, an architecture and interior design firm based in Cambridge, Mass. "When people choose to live somewhere, they're choosing to become part of a story."

Contrary to what some people might think, a development's name does not have to be something that's never been used before, Uzee maintains. More important is its narrative and message, he says, and how relevant and valid that is for the property. "There has to be a good match between the name and the property, and one that also considers the cultural aspects of a market. All that makes it a robust choice."



Residents do not look for a good name, per se, but one that is a good fit for them, Uzee points out. Developing a compelling name is a complicated process, he reports, involving the development team, designers and real estate brokers.



Uzee's work focuses on integrating branding with interior design and architecture to create a consistent message throughout a development, from the marketing materials all the way through to the design of the building itself. In fact, on many of the firm's multifamily projects, in addition to naming the development and creating its logo, ADD Inc also developed the print and Internet marketing materials. For some, the firm also designed the architecture and interiors for the condo development itself.

Instead of first coming up with a name, Add Inc starts by developing a "creative brief" for each naming project. This brief reviews major themes, the distinctive qualities of a development and the story behind the project. It considers the physical, experiential and psychological attributes of a community to create a compelling identity. This process gives the project a focus, and creates an organized structure in which to evaluate a name's effectiveness.

Imaging sessions look at who the competitors in an area are, what type of lifestyle is targeted, and what kind of image is desired, among other topics. ADD Inc. then usually prepares a memo with a collection of images and offers the developer a choice of three names, based on different categories, such as area flora, fauna and activities.

“When dealing with things like this that are so abstract, this naming process provides focus and a linear strategy,” Uzee explains.

Having a story can add to the community’s perceived value, Uzee notes. The primary goal is to make the development appealing to the resident, but the story is also something a client can use to market the property. It is not just applicable for high-end projects, he adds, and can be used in a number of price ranges to position condos in the marketplace.

Uzee has led many naming and branding projects for multi-housing developments in many parts of the U.S. as well as Japan. Most recently, his team named and branded condominium projects like Whitewater Terrace in Vail, Colo. and East Pier in East Boston, Mass.

The logo for Whitewater Terrace, a residential property between Vail and Beaver Creek, Colo. on the Eagle River, was designed to capture both the development’s look and feel, spotlighting its serene beauty and exhilarating adventure opportunities.

In Boston, the logo for East Pier, considered a new side of Boston Harbor, suggests the panoramic views, luminous light and adventurous spirit of living on the water. Architecture, planning and branding joined together to re-imagine a vast arc of abandoned docklands as a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood.

Alchemy Properties

Developing names for his buildings is something that Kenneth Horn, president and founder of New York-based Alchemy Properties gets very involved in. Horn enjoys this process but also includes his staff, from administrative to partners, in it as well. He believes that it’s important that each condominium name is backed by a solid reason for being and some sort of historical or area reference. “New York is very good at re-invention but it’s nice if you can tie a name into the city’s past.”

When it comes time to choose a name, Horn mulls it over for a couple of weeks and researches the area history. Then, he gives his employees a week to come up with their own suggestions. They all convene to soundly debate the merits of each suggestion. “We have fun with it but essentially, we trash each proposal. Twenty-eight out of 30 names may be absolutely atrocious.” The group votes on the choices, but, Horn admits, “My vote has more weight.”

However, one of his most recent condo projects, The Indigo, was named by one of Alchemy’s staffers, Mable Ning. Located in Manhattan’s Chelsea neighborhood at 125 W. 21st St., the building derives its name from the indigo-colored metal accent panels on its zinc-paneled exterior.

Horn says he appreciates all his employees’ recommendations and notes that it’s especially helpful to get input from staffers younger than himself. “If my market is

aimed at 28-40 year olds, I don't want to come up with a reference that's just relevant for someone who's in their 50s," warns Horn.

Near The Indigo stands Alchemy's renovated condominium dubbed The Bullmoose, located at 42-48 E. 20th St., four doors down the block from the townhouse where former President Teddy Roosevelt was born. The Bullmoose is named after Roosevelt's Progressive Party and epitomizes the president's noteworthy strength and vitality. This 1890s-era, Beaux Arts-style building now contains 23 luxury loft residences.

When launching its condominiums at brokers' parties, Alchemy continues the project's theme at these events. For example, attendees at the brokers' party for the Bullmoose Condominium could have their pictures taken with a life-sized cardboard cutout figure of Teddy Roosevelt. And Blue Valentine was the theme for the Indigo party, held on Feb. 14.

Another cleverly named Alchemy project is the 46-unit Lookout Hill Condominium in Brooklyn, located on the cusp of Brooklyn Heights and Boerum Hill. It traces its name to a key area battleground of the Revolutionary War.

However, the developer did not choose an antler chandelier for the lobby of the Bullmoose or Colonial-style furnishings and muskets for Lookout Hill's lobby in order "not to go overboard," Horn explains.

Location also influenced the name of 120 Gramercy Hill Condominium because it helps bridge this building's location on East 29th St., bordering the two distinctive, adjoining neighborhoods of Gramercy Park and Murray Hill.

Ideally, the project name also has to spark the design for an eye-catching logo. Horn prefers a logo that features an image, rather than just the letters of the building name.

A former real estate attorney, Horn explains that his firm's market niche is to develop luxury high-end condominiums in prime Manhattan and Brooklyn locations at prices that are slightly lower than established market prices.

Horn insists he still likes the name of The Paradigm Condominium in Chelsea "even though half the people who visit it can't pronounce it."

One example of a name that he rejected in the past was Redwood Condominium, for a building faced in redwood panels, "because when I looked that name up on the Internet, there were 9,000 redwood condos already."

"If any of the names aren't good, I have no one to blame but myself. But I think this is one of the more fun aspects of the job."



Lisa Maysonet, senior vice president for Prudential Douglas Elliman, a large New York real estate services company, is a fan of project names that clue you into where they're situated, such as Barbizon/63 and Sheffield57. Maysonet likes how these building names maintain the history of a well-known landmark like the Barbizon

Plaza Hotel while adding the street number to update the title and further pinpoint the building's location.

Barbizon/63 is now a 66-unit condominium from BPG Properties located on East 63rd Street in what had for decades been an exclusive residential hotel for young women like Grace Kelly and Liza Minnelli. The Sheffield is an 845-unit condo conversion located on West 57th St.

"With River Place, River View, you know what that's about," adds Maysonet, who leads her team, Group Maysonet, in collaborating with developers to provide strategic marketing, pre-development planning and sales.

"The main thing when choosing a building's name is to say, 'who's my target market and develop a name that addresses their interests and what sort of lifestyle they aspire to,'" Maysonet emphasizes. Then, consistently carry that theme through all your marketing materials to reinforce it, she advises. For example, on a condo that used to be a 19th-century stable, the company created leather-bound marketing materials tied with rope.

With spa-related developments such as The Setai and The Miraval, she points out, the name embodies the whole lifestyle.

"If it's a strong address, such a Fifth Avenue, play it up," Maysonet recommends. "Or if it has an environmentally friendly aspect, such as that at Urban Green, a 44-unit condominium in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, build on it."

She also likes the name of the 44-unit Badge Building condominium in Long Island City, N.Y., which alludes to its previous function as a factory that made police badges.

Even naming trends can go out of fashion. A while ago, Maysonet recalls, it was cool in New York City to use the word "lofts" in a building's title. In some parts of the city, which are newer to redevelopment, it still attracts attention, but in most areas, she says, lofts have become kind of passé. So, then people used "flats" to distinguish a property, and added "townhouses" to the name if there are duplex condos.

But boring names can still work, too, Maysonet adds.

What makes something a bad name, Maysonet believes, is one that people can't pronounce or can't remember or "it just makes no sense." Like what? MHN asks. "I can't remember," she replies.

Hit Factory Condominiums

The Hit Factory Condominiums in New York echo the name of the legendary recording studio that was once housed in the same building on W. 54th St. A large collection of platinum and gold albums will hang in the lobby of the seven-story, 27-unit condominium. A first-floor recording studio will showcase displays by Gibson Guitars. HF Sponsor Corporation, a joint venture of Arizona-based Sagamore Capital and Core Plus Properties LLC of Stamford, Conn., are developing the project at 421 West 54th Street.

Amrit Resort & Residences

Translated from ancient Sanskrit, Amrit means the elixir of life or a rejuvenating drink, and that was the mood that developer Dilip Barot, chairman & CEO of Creative Choice Group, wanted to create with his Amrit Resort & Residences on Singer Island, near Palm Beach, Fla. The project aims to focus on balanced living, integrated wellness and personalized luxury.

Neo, Vertika, Wind, Cima

In Miami, developer and lofts pioneer Lissette Calderon, CEO of Neo Concepts LLC, gets together with her team to brainstorm on the names of her developments, based on the identity of each building. She calls these moments their “pink fuzzy slipper” creative moments.

First of all, the corporate name, NEO, meaning “new” in Spanish, mirrors the company’s mission, which is to define trends, not follow them.

Its first project was the aptly named Neo Lofts, whose name comes from being the first loft project in Miami. Calderon wanted to brand the concept with this title.

Vertika, Neo’s second project, ties into the vertical aspect of the spaces. Neo was reportedly Miami’s first developer to offer splits-style units, featuring 20-ft.-high ceilings.

Neo’s third project was called Wind to reflect the ever-evolving lifestyles of its residents. The project is the first to offer K- Rooms, which are rooms centrally located in the units that can adapt to residents’ changing needs.



And Neo’s fourth project is dubbed CIMA, which means “the summit” in Spanish and Italian, because the developer considers the lifestyle and views offered by the 52-story, 507-unit CIMA to be the pinnacle of luxury living with hotel-like amenities in a live/work/play lifestyle on the Miami River. The name CIMA also alludes to the international services and amenities offered to residents such as a multilingual concierge, an international newsstand and lifestyle coordinator.

Solaria

Arc Development’s Solaria, a 20-story condominium building in the tony Riverdale section of The Bronx, derives its name from the Spanish words for sun and air. The tallest building in the area, Solaria features a unique stargazing deck -- New York City’s first rooftop observatory, equipped with a top-of-the-line Meade telescope.

Solaria offers its residents an exclusive stargazing package including rooftop stargazing sessions, educational astronomy programs from the Amateur Astronomers Association of New York, a one-year membership to the association and a one-year membership to Manhattan’s Museum of Natural History, home to the Rose Center Planetarium’s year-round stargazing exhibitions.

At a recent reception, prospective condo buyers had an opportunity to sun-and-

star-gaze with the Amateur Astronomers Association of New York as well a view a model unit.

Signature Place

In St. Petersburg, Fla., the development team started with a formal rigorous naming process to reflect the specific architecture and location of a 246-unit condominium now under construction. Since the project was located in a city that is a peninsula and the design was "Florida Modern," they initially went with the Peninsula for a name. After the design was presented to the numerous city authorities for approval, the project was reportedly often described as the "signature" project for the city. The developer's marketing firm, Soffer + Adkins of Fort Lauderdale, picked up on this, changed the name to "Signature Place" and built a marketing program around it.

Signature Place was conceived from the shared vision of the developer Joel Cantor of Cantor Development and acclaimed architect Ralph Johnson. When complete, it will be the tallest structure in Pinellas County, spanning an entire downtown block in the waterfront community's live/work/play corridor.

St. Petersburg-based Clemmons Architecture is associate architect; EDAW, a nationally known landscape architect, is designing the Urban Plaza and Sky Garden; and the six-story Waterwall is being designed by the equally acclaimed WET Design.

ELEMENT Condominiums

ELEMENT Condominiums at 555 W. 59th St. mined its name from the developers' commitment to maximizing the earth's essential elements of earth, water, light and air. For instance, to symbolize earth, the building boasts the largest private outdoor space in New York City, with 12,000 sq. ft. On the liquid front, ELEMENT boasts a 60-ft.-long lap pool and also the city's only private kiddie pool. And each unit has floor-to-ceiling windows to let in the most light possible.

Evo

For its third condominium high rise in downtown Los Angeles' South Park neighborhood, The South Group chose the name Evo as a play off evolution. The 23-story Evo is a taller building, a step up in the exterior architectural elevations on the same block. Now under construction, Evo will contain 311 condos and five two-story live+work units. It is expected to be complete in late summer 2008 and to earn LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Silver certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

The South Group is a joint venture partnership of Portland, Ore.-based developers Williams & Dame and Gerding/Edlen.

BLU 44 Condominiums

In Chicago, sales are underway at BLU 44 Condominiums, a new-construction luxury development at South Saint Lawrence Avenue in the Bronzeville neighborhood on the city's South Side. This eight-unit development features two newly constructed four-unit buildings separated by a landscaped courtyard, according to Michelle Browne of Rubloff Residential Properties, the exclusive sales

and marketing agent. Browne notes that BLU 44 was named to honor Bronzeville's blues music tradition, which flourished along 47th and 43rd streets during the early decades of the 20th century, when the neighborhood was a mecca for top African-American artists, writers and entrepreneurs. Bronzeville itself was named because it was once the epicenter of African-American cultural, business and political life in the city as well as a national destination for African Americans journeying from the south.

Aurora Over The Hudson, Laduree

The Pinnacle Companies of Chatham, N.J. also selects very distinctive names for its communities, such as Aurora Over The Hudson for its Cliffside Park, N.J. condominium featuring YOO by Starck finesse by noted French designer Philippe Starck. The two 11-story towers are expected to contain 131 units when completed in 2010. Another Pinnacle project now under construction is Laduree, a 384-unit active adult community in Franklin Township, N.J., is named after a Parisian bistro and evokes a European design flair.

Name Changes

And sometimes, names need to be revised. Sky Development Inc., a national owner, manager and developer of residential and commercial real estate properties, recently had to change the name of the mixed-use community it is building in Aventura, Fla.

The 7.5-acre project, consisting of 53 two- or three-story town townhomes, 51 two-story condominiums and penthouses, signature ground-floor retail, Class A office space and a flagship hotel, previously was named City Place Aventura but has been renamed City Park Aventura.

This decision was made following notification of a trademark conflict with a shopping center in West Palm Beach called City Place. The developers had checked on the name but unfortunately were misinformed.

"With real estate development at the forefront of the South Florida market, there are many projects being built, and from time-to-time they cross identities with other," observes Yizhak Toledano, CEO of Sky Development Inc., who is building City Park Aventura in partnership with David Levy, the firm's director of new development. "Sky Development is happy to have found a name that continues to properly reflect the magnitude of this unique, landmark development."

Levy adds, "With its own lushly landscaped park and several surrounding parks, the City Park Aventura name truly embodies the live, work and play environment it will offer this beautiful city."