

[Home & Design]



Phoenix (Hill) Rising

By Donna Andrews Russell
Photos by Ted Tarquinio

This snazzy townhome in the quickly growing Liberty Green development offers energy efficiency, easy maintenance and proximity to the trendsetting NuLu neighborhood.



Mercantile Lofts, Waterfront Park Place and Fleur de Lis on Main may have helped re-popularize downtown living, but they don't allow homebuyers the chance to own a patch of dirt. That's what makes the new Phoenix Hill development, The Edge at NuLu, decidedly different. "The Edge represents the first time in years people are able to buy ground downtown and not be part of a condo association," says Bill Weyland, managing partner at CITY Properties Group, one of three partners involved with the project.

What made The Edge possible was the demolition of the Clarksdale public housing complex through the federal Hope VI program, which "takes barracks-style housing for low-income people and provides funds to eliminate and rebuild new housing," Weyland explains. The first phase of the project, subsidized rental housing for working families, was com-

pleted under the auspices of Louisville Metro Housing Authority in 2009.

The second phase started four years ago when CITY Properties teamed with urban infill specialists AU Associates in Lexington, Ky., to "become the developers of the homeownership phase of Liberty Green," says Weyland. After visiting successful Hope VI programs in other cities, the partners felt the new mixed-income neighborhood needed three things to succeed: connection to the rebounding NuLu and Butchertown neighborhoods and to the Louisville Medical Center, where 25,000 people are employed; a retail street presence; and enough residents to support that retail presence. Those factors led to The Edge's unique row-house design.

"This type of housing is an example of higher-density urban housing. Row houses haven't been a big thing in Louisville since the turn of the century, but

in big urban centers they're all over the place," Weyland says. "The architecture is contemporary and clean, but it's also easy to maintain. The mix in these neighborhoods is typically the young and the old. They're interested in low-maintenance properties."

Of the 32 row-house-style residences on the drawing board for The Edge, eight are at or near completion, with three of those already sold. Eric and Mariah Gratz, who purchased their three-story, 2,400-square-foot home in February, were the first to buy. The medical-device engineers met while working on an artificial-heart system for Abiomed Inc. in Boston and moved to Louisville three years ago, when Mariah's father, CITY Properties' Weyland, asked her to come home to work at the development firm. She is now COO of the family business; her husband is employed at MedVenture Technology in Jeffersonville, Ind.

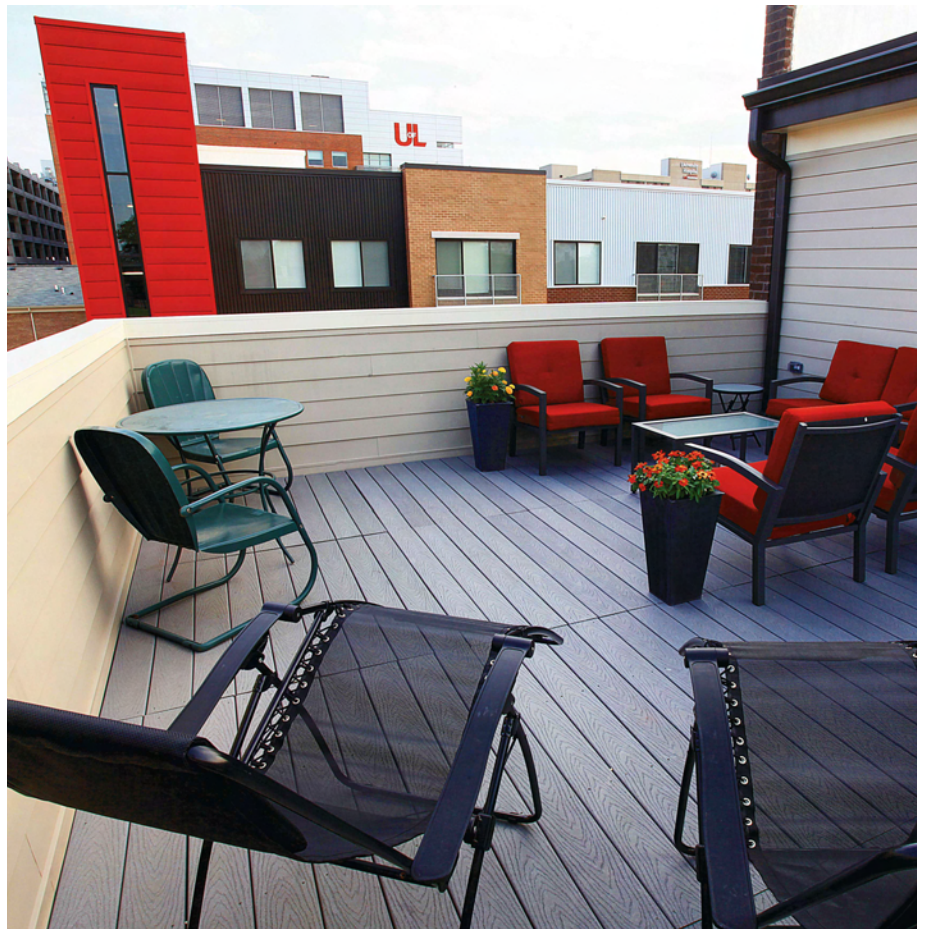


The couple purchased their row house when it was “at shell stage,” she says, getting help with the interior design from Kara Fultz at the Weber Group, a Louisville-based design/build partner for the development. Style, cost and a preference for American-made over foreign-made products whenever possible all factored into their final decisionmaking. “We wanted a certain look at a certain price,” Mariah Gratz says. In addition to working with Fultz, the couple made several trips to Chicago for inspiration.

One of the home’s most striking features is the contemporary staircase with its beechwood treads and steel risers. Though it looks custom-made, it was actually assembled on-site from a modular kit by Misterstep, which manufactures easy-to-assemble kits for spiral, retractable and outdoor staircases too. Adding interest to the second-floor landing is a set of stair-stepped cabinets that display family photos.

For the walls on the first floor, the Gratzes chose two complementary shades of gray — lighter PPG Porter Tempered Steel in the living room and darker Juniper Berry in the dining room and kitchen. Most of their furnishings came from the Minnesota-based supplier Room & Board. “We went up to the Chicago showroom and then ordered it online. The shipping fee for a houseful of stuff was \$230,” Mariah says. “We like the

The kitchen’s sleek look (opposite page) includes brushed aluminum, frosted glass, dark wood and white surfaces; the modular “floating” staircase (above and right) has beech treads and steel risers; the rear-facing third-floor deck.





style. It's got a modern, contemporary look. Plus most of it is American-made and the price points are OK. It's better-quality than IKEA."

Like the staircase, the cherry, brushed-aluminum and frosted-glass kitchen cabinets by InnerMost are modular units. The couple found them at Home Depot after an extensive search for modern, frameless, American-made cabinets. One of the advantages they offer is greater storage capacity because there is no front frame. The result: cabinets that are an inch deeper and drawers with 60 percent more interior space than traditionally framed cabinets.

For the kitchen backsplash, they chose Velas Blanco by Porcelanosa. Though the tile appears to be a mosaic, "it's actually a 12-by-16-inch solid tile — not as many grout lines, so it stays clean," says Mariah. The wall-mounted shelves came from IKEA. "We went to the Merchandise Mart in Chicago and were inspired by an Italian kitchen we saw. They get the clutter off the counters," the homeowner says. Because natural-gas appliances were not available, they purchased an electric induction stove. "It's very exact," she observes. "I had to relearn how to cook, but I like the preciseness of it."

The second floor includes the master suite with a private bath; two more bedrooms; a hall bath; and a laundry room with a stacked washer and dryer. Rather than utilize the third floor for a fourth bedroom, the Gratzes have set it up as a family/recreation room and home office.

Two features The Edge offers that condos usually don't are a two-car garage, where Eric can pursue his antique-car hobby (he's in the process of restoring both a Studebaker and 1958 Porsche), and an enclosed courtyard in back, where the couple can grill and entertain in privacy. The off-street parking and contained courtyard also help make The Edge secure, says Weyland, who maintains that urban homes need to be "energy-efficient, easily maintained, defensible space." ■



A second-floor guest bedroom (top) has an IKEA bedspread neutralized by gray-painted walls, while the master suite's walls pop with rusty red. The third floor (left) serves as both home office and family room.