



[ajc.com](#) > [Print Edition](#)

## THE LAP OF LUXURY

Living high in Atlanta  
Condo boom opens up a ripe demand for posh penthouses

By [Julie B. Hairston](#)  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
Published on: 10/17/06

Metro Atlanta has a growing new residential class: penthouse dwellers.

Since Marjorie Merriweather Post Hutton occupied the first New York penthouse in 1925, the tip-top lifestyle has become a fixture in American fantasy life. Its image is so strong that publishing kingpin Bob Guccione named his men's magazine Penthouse, hoping to evoke visions of decadence and urbane elegance.

But Atlanta's historic preference for lawns and cul-de-sacs relegated penthouse living to no more than a tiny fraction of the metro area's housing market.

Atlanta real estate market analyst Alan Wexler said local developers waited some 30 years for the hoped-for penthouse market to emerge.

"Years ago, when they first built Colony Square, they would always say, 'Atlanta is ripe for penthouse living.' They'd always point to New York, Chicago and other big cities," Wexler said. "But the market was not very deep, and the vast majority of people who lived here were from the South."

Now, evidence suggests, the wait is over.

The flurry of condo development from downtown parking lots to suburban hillsides has developers and real estate agents reporting unusually brisk trade in penthouses.

In July and August alone, Coldwell Banker The Condo Store inked contracts for nine metro Atlanta penthouses priced from \$750,000, said executive Vice President David Tufts.

"Now, oftentimes, they're the first thing to go," Tufts said.

In part, this stems from the architectural deviations available in the top floors of a high-rise, said Novare Group president Jim Borders. Higher ceilings, larger floor plans and additional terrace space are a strong lure for well-heeled buyers willing to pay the hundreds of thousands of dollars those extras command.

All of the penthouses at Aqua, rising at the intersection of 10th and West Peachtree streets, have been sold, Tufts said. Sales at Aqua opened in May.

Coldwell Banker The Condo Store represents four communities with nine penthouses on the market. All have been on the market for fewer than 90 days and range from \$750,000 to more than \$1.8 million.

Eight of the 34 penthouses in three properties currently being marketed by Novare are under contract, company officials said. The company sold 20 penthouses at four intown properties before 2006.

With its residential floors starting on the 18th floor, Midtown's recently announced Palomar Residences on West Peachtree Street is billing its 38 plush units, ranging from \$1 million to \$2.7 million, as all-penthouse. The lower floors will contain hotel rooms and amenities.

Janis Kirtz, president of Morris and Raper, which will be handling sales at the Palomar, said the term "penthouse" is now used to indicate more of a lifestyle than an actual location. Even on the top floor, the luxury units often share walls with other penthouses.

"It's a unit with the best of everything," Kirtz said, "all of the glamour, the sophistication and exclusivity of a penthouse."

Because sales and marketing data do not designate penthouses as a category, reliable figures showing how many penthouses are in metro Atlanta are not available. But anecdotal counts suggest their growing ranks.

"Potentially, we've got 200 or 300 existing or coming into the market," Wexler said.

Of the three penthouses now under contract at The Aberdeen in Cobb County, one is now held by Aberdeen developer Taz Anderson. He plans to move into the 14-story Vinings development from his current single-family Buckhead residence.

"We have a nice backyard, a pool and a tennis court, which I only use about once a year," Anderson said. "I reflect on that when I get the bills for repairs and taxes."

Anderson, 67, said he is looking forward to lower taxes, a picturesque view of downtown and a hip spot for entertaining his three grandchildren. With vacation homes in Myrtle Beach, S.C., and Highlands, N.C., Anderson also appreciates the security of a penthouse when he's away.

"Fifteen years ago, I doubt I would be thinking like this, but time goes on and things change," Anderson said.

A pair of two-story penthouses at Manhattan in Sandy Springs were among the first units under contract, according to a spokeswoman. And three of 11 penthouses have sold at Horizon at Wildwood, a new 18-story condominium near Powers Ferry and Windy Hill roads.

Claudia and Wayne Burke, who currently live in a single-family home in northeast Atlanta, bought two of the Horizon penthouses and plan to combine them into a single six-bedroom, 5,300-square-foot unit.

"A couple of years ago, if somebody had asked me if I'd like to live in a high-rise, I'd have said no," said Claudia Burke, 64.

But the Burkes saw an ad for Horizon and fell under the spell of living without yard work or exterior maintenance. And they loved the prospect of a sweeping perspective over the nearby Chattahoochee River Nature Preserve.

"We felt like there wouldn't be any buildings going up in front of us to block the view," Burke said.

### Old and young

Tufts said many of the new penthouse residents will be older empty-nesters like Anderson and the Burkes, but some are young professionals eager to embrace the glittering image of penthouse life.

Endocrinologist Jason Berner, 34, represents another type of penthouse buyer, the investor. With his medical practice partner, Berner spent \$636,000 for a two-bedroom, two-bath, 1,800-square-foot penthouse at Horizon.

Berner said he believes the market is a little overbuilt right now, but he expects migration and population shifts to eventually absorb the construction surge. And that, he said, makes a penthouse with a great view a sound investment.

"In terms of what we're going to do with it, we have a year to decide," Berner said.

Kirtz, of Morris and Raper, said Atlanta also is becoming more of a draw for big-money globetrotters to whom a seven-figure price tag is not a budget stretcher.

"They're looking for as much privacy and exclusivity as they can get," Kirtz said. "We're going to have penthouses in Atlanta this year from \$1 million to \$10 million, and we're going to sell them all."

### High and mighty

Urban sociologist Mark Gottdiener, a professor at New York University at Buffalo, said a building boom like the condo surge Atlanta is now experiencing almost always caters first to wealthy buyers. Historically, he said, the rich have built their homes on the highest elevations.

"Wealthy people like to lord it over others," Gottdiener said. "One way is to buy the God's-eye view."

Wexler said the depth of metro Atlanta's penthouse market still has not been tested, but demographic trends suggest the current spate of high-rise toppers will find buyers.

"They're still competing with million-dollar houses that are not too far out. The Southern mentality resisted [high-rise living] when we were a pretty Southern town. But now there's not so much Southern mentality, and there are so many people here who are not from the South. And people are aging."

ON AJC.COM: A PHOTO GALLERY OF AN ATLANTA PENTHOUSE

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/printedition/2006/10/17/bizpenthouse1017a.html>

☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.