

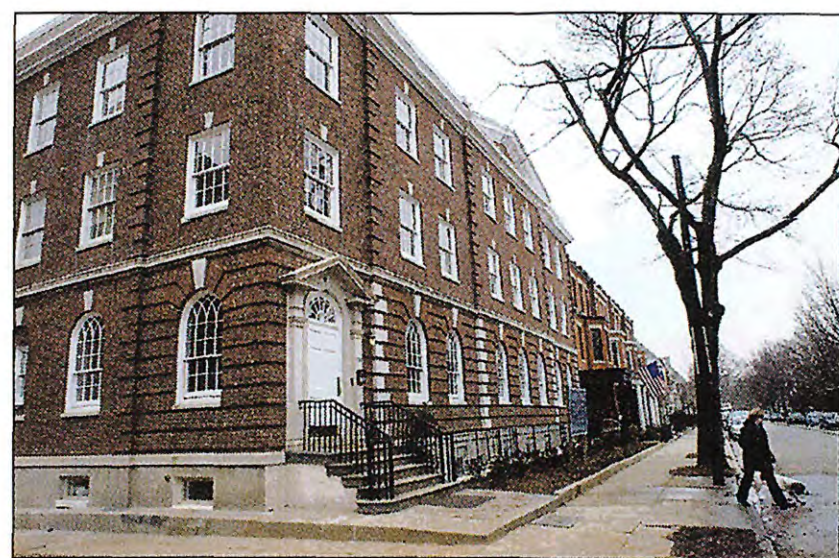
# REAL ESTATE

## THE NEW URBAN HOUSING MARKET

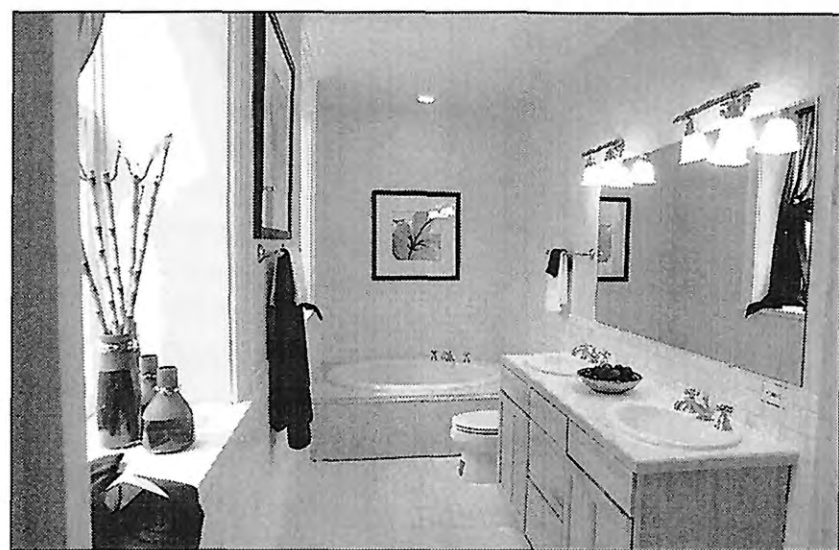


BRUCE PARKER/TIMES-DISPATCH

Developer Robin Miller, in the kitchen of a Laurel Hill unit, says Richmond is primed for urban condo space.



Nurses once lived at Laurel Hill House, a one-time dormitory that served Stuart Circle Hospital. It now houses 10 high-end condominium units.



A garden tub, dual sinks and recessed lighting highlight the bath in one Laurel Hill unit.

# Bedside manor

## Nurse's dorm revitalized into luxury condos

BY MCGREGOR McCANCE  
TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

The long hallways in the Laurel Hill House look about the same as they did when the building opened in 1931 as a nurse's dormitory. The building's Georgian Revival exterior is mostly unchanged, too.

That's where most similarities end.

Developer Robin Miller has spent about \$4 million to buy the building,

overhaul the interior and to pay such costs as architectural fees and related expenses.

The result: a 10-unit development, each unit with at least 1,700 square feet, and price tags starting at \$400,000.

Bracketed by the former Stuart Circle Hospital and row houses on West Avenue in the Fan District, Laurel Hill House is a sign of the times in the city's housing market.

The project is the latest entry into a

budding trend of condominium developments within the city limits.

Richmond stalwarts such as Tuscan Villas, The Prestwold and The Warsaw have been around for years. But Laurel Hill House, along with another of Robin Miller's developments in Oregon Hill and a development on Main Street in the financial district have generated new momentum for city condominiums.

Miller, who has developed condos in New York, Massachusetts and other states, said condominium development

in urban historic properties already is common in other cities. (His Oregon Hill project is new construction.)

"It's happening everywhere," he said. "Richmond is typically five years behind everywhere else in trends."

Miller came to Richmond nine years ago, and he said the city has the right elements to support more condominiums.

"Richmond, in my view, has more significant architecturally historic buildings than any city I've seen," he said. "That's one of the reasons I'm here."

Miller's other local condominiums, the Parsons Row Townhouses, are on Spring Street in Oregon Hill. He plans to convert apartments developed in the former Robert E. Lee School on Kensington Avenue into condominiums in five years.

Meanwhile, REO Enterprises recently began selling condominiums in a renovated building at 1205 E. Main St. The developers already are exploring new projects for downtown condos.

Other developers say they, too, are increasingly interested in developing condominiums or converting apartments into condos after the five-year historic tax credit expires.

Jennie Knapp, executive director of the Alliance to Conserve Old Richmond Neighborhoods, hasn't seen the Laurel Hill House project. But she said Miller won the group's first "Historic Developer Award" in 2000 for similar projects.

"We applaud his efforts to breathe new life into old neighborhoods by finding uses for buildings that have outlived their original purposes," Knapp said.

The building no longer serves as a dorm, but several of the original dorm rooms remain as bedrooms. And Miller restored the reception hall to its original condition. The room, estimated at 500 square feet, now serves as a living room in one unit.

The architect for the project is Freeman Solt of Kingsport, Tenn.

• Contact McGregor McCance at (804) 649-6348 or mmccance@timesdispatch.com



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The 10 units in the Laurel Hill House start at \$400,000 and retain much of the 71-year-old building's original charm.