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Consultant gives stalled projects a jump-start Condos get rescued

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Real estate risks that send some developers running – those mired in financial woes or are in need of considerable modifications – are exactly what drive Andy Howe.

A Wyoming native, Howe is head of Cranewoods Development LLC in Jacksonville, Fla. There, he spends most of his time working as a consultant to developers and lenders trying to reach deals for projects impacted by the real estate boom and bust.

“We help stalled projects get restarted,” he says.

And that’s exactly what brought Howe back to Cincinnati.

This time, he’s using his own money to restore two financially distressed condo projects, long stalled by the weakened housing market.

“These are the projects I love doing,” he says. “Otherwise, I wouldn’t be doing it.”

In East Walnut Hills, Howe recently finalized a deal to purchase five remaining condo units at Schoolhouse Lofts on Ashland Avenue.

The 31-unit property fell into trouble in 2009.

“When the market went sideways, the developer ran out of money, and the property got mired in liens and no one could close on the units,” Howe said.



Andy Howe of Cranewoods Development LLC has restarted two condominium projects that stalled after the market downturn.

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Through his negotiations with lien holders and lenders, including Cincinnati Development Fund (CDF), a non-profit lending institution established to finance affordable housing development and community revitalization, Howe purchased the remaining condos and kept them out of foreclosure.

Three of the units are under renovation, with two listed for sale. The prices range from \$145,000 to \$204,000.

“It was a project that had a lot of success until the market turned,” Howe said.

Downtown, Howe’s nearly completed a makeover at McFarland Lofts, a 7-unit condominium project at 304 McFarland Street.

Similar to Schoolhouse, the project was halted in 2007 when its former developer ran out of money.

Late last year Howe purchased the mortgage on the property, a 141-year-old building that once housed a wagon warehouse for Cincinnati Gas Light & Coke.

Unlike Schoolhouse, far more work awaited Howe at McFarland.

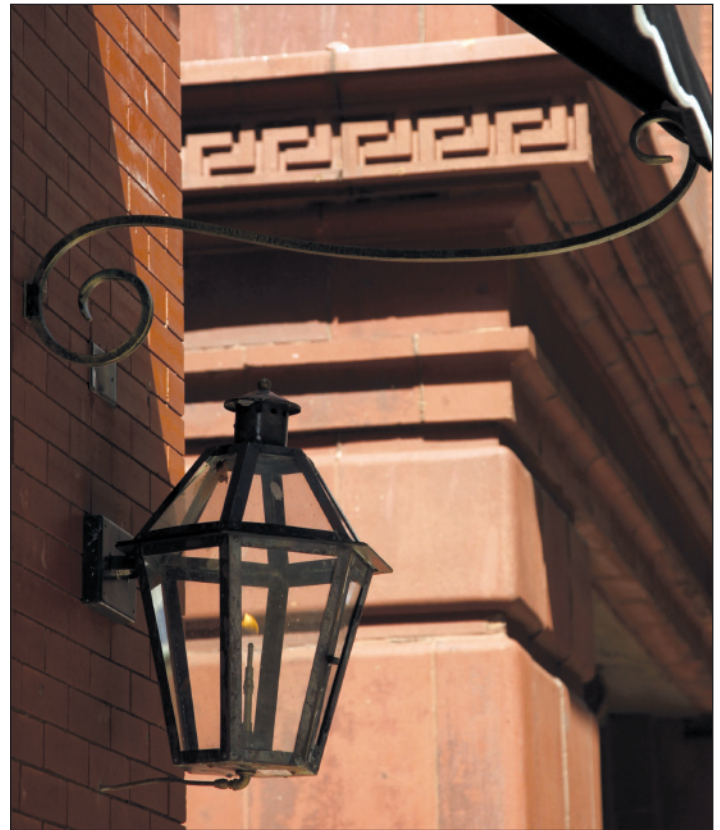
He’s upgraded each unit with granite counter tops, new kitchens, bamboo floors and sound-proofed ceilings and floors.

Howe also tapped downtown-based Wichman+Gunther Architects to rework some of the floor plans. The firm has done extensive work with developers in Over-the-Rhine on several historic building renovations into condominiums and apartments.

At McFarland, the firm opened up the floor plans by eliminating dropped ceilings and galley kitchens that had been installed.

Already, four of the seven condos have been sold at McFarland. The remaining units are priced from \$199,000 to \$259,000.

“Certainly Andy has found a niche in resuscitating projects that have otherwise been unable to capture the market,” said Mark Gunther, a principal at Wichman+Gunther. “Andy



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The McFarland Lofts downtown are in a former wagon warehouse for Cincinnati Gas Light & Coke.

typifies the kind of person we love to do projects with. These boutique developers are like small batch brewers – (they) don’t have a volume problem and they have a lot of passion.”