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Have lofts lost their edge?

By Scott Van Voorhis

That's one question that comes to mind with this morning's announcement of another auction at a new Boston condo/loft development.

The renovated [American Brewery Lofts](#) features a mix of loft-style units with 23-foot-high ceilings in a renovated 19th century brewery building, one that was expanded by the developer with parking and space for some additional units as well.

As is common with new developments, whether residential or commercial, there appears to be an address game going on here. The project touts a Jamaica Plain address, but arguably is in Mission Hill or at least right on the line of the two neighborhoods.

The project's latest marketing team insists that yes, it really is Jamaica Plain. Sorry, but I think I will side [with City Hall](#) and the project's architect, both of whom place the project at 251 Heath St. in Mission Hill.

"The Brewery Lofts project will greatly benefit the residents of Mission Hill with the reuse of the historically significant brewery buildings by providing much needed additional housing to this neighborhood," said former Boston Redevelopment Authority Director Mark Maloney in a press statement when the project was approved in 2004.

The developer sold most of the units, but has fallen into financial trouble, and, under a deal with his lender, a major union pension fund, will try and sell off the remaining 21 of the project's 79 units at an auction on Saturday, June 26th. (It is slated for noon at the Colonnade Hotel in the Back Bay.)

Minimum prices start in the \$195,000-to-\$295,000 range - a big step down from the \$299,000-to-\$700,000 range the project kicked off with more than two years ago. Boston-based Velocity Marketing Services is orchestrating the current marketing campaign and upcoming auction.

The units range in size from just 810 square feet to over 1,600 square feet, with garage parking included in the price.

Still, the big question now is whether the loft concept has finally worn out its welcome.

During the bubble years, every developer in town jumped on the loft concept, flooding parts of the South End and South Boston's Fort Point warehouse district with shiny new loft units.

In more than a few cases, the new developments pushed out real artists who had pioneered the loft concept in long neglected industrial buildings.

Certainly, the appetite for authentic loft living appears to have faded somewhat.

Many potential loft buyers now don't necessarily want to gaze at a large, unstructured space, no matter how much potential, according to Velocity's Sue Hawkes, which successfully auctioned off loft-style units last year at the South End's 1850.

At the American Brewery complex, Velocity is relying on a model unit to demonstrate how buyers can divide up and design all that loft space.

The developer has also gone ahead and put in bamboo floors and other finishes, giving the units a warmer feel, she said.

"They like the lofts, but they don't understand how to live in them," Hawkes said of today's loft buyers. "You give them models and staging that shows them how to live in it."

Still, as you have already guessed, these are far from the artists' lofts of old.

I'll leave you off with a passage from the press release on the upcoming auction of the American Brewery loft units.

"Kitchens boast stainless steel appliances and countertops that combine Formica and butcher block. Modern baths offer sleek finishes, including vessel sinks, and all loft residences have washer/dryer hookups, individual climate control and are pre-wired for cable and Internet."