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Page 3

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THIS WEEK

Bringing Vegas To Atlantic City

Pinnacle says the \$1.5 billion extravaganza it plans here will be as ground-breaking as the company's Venetian casino-hotel in Las Vegas.
Page 3

Change of SOX

Proposed guidelines to help firms comply with the Sarbanes-Oxley Act draw mixed reviews from local experts.
Page 3

Board of Contributors

Political activist Candace Straight doubts that lawmakers have much taste for real election reform.
Page 14

Interview

Banking Commissioner Steven Goldman views the collapse of the subprime mortgage market as a manageable problem.
Page 15

Economic Heartbeat

The state lost 6,200 jobs in February as the country surged ahead, but the jobless rate dipped and remains below the national level.
Page 16

FEATURES

- 14 Our Point of View
- 14 Getting Down to Business
- 15 The Bottom Line
- 36 NJBIZ Scene
- 39 Around the State

FOR THE RECORD

- 30 Who's News
- 31 Calendar
- 34 Bankruptcies
- 34 M&As
- 35 Insider Trading
- 38 Classified Marketplace

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Ancient Design Principles, New Selling Points

Architects and developers are using feng shui to create more saleable dwellings

By Evelyn Lee

THE ANCIENT CHINESE ART of feng shui, long regarded a New Age practice out of the design mainstream, is getting serious attention from architects and developers. It is influencing residential developments in the state, especially those whose target market may include a lot of Asians. Developers and architects find feng shui, which focuses on the proper orientation of buildings and layout of rooms to create a more pleasant environment, beneficial for marketing purposes while complementing the design process.

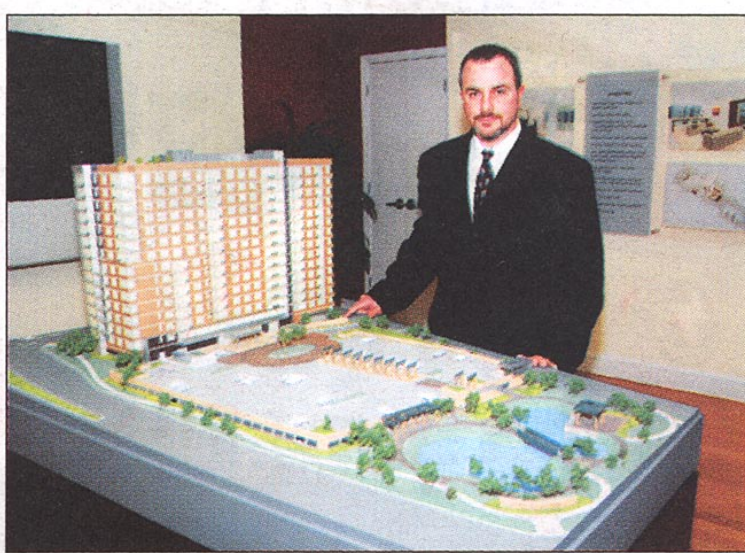
Residential developer Tarragon Corp. is building two feng shui-influenced luxury-condominium projects on New Jersey's Gold Coast—the area along the Hudson River stretching from Fort Lee to Bayonne. One Hudson Park in Edgewater and Trio in Palisades Park, which are the first Tarragon developments to apply feng shui principles to architecture, have been designed to lure members of the areas sizable Asian population.

"We do realize there would be a good percentage of Korean or Asian purchasers and we would want to build something that would appeal to them," says Christopher Winslow, director of marketing at Tarragon in New York City.

Many Asian buyers would prefer a house that is built according to feng shui principles, says Winslow. In fact, some Asians, renovate existing homes so that they are feng shui-correct, he says. With One Hudson Park and Trio, however, "the feng shui consideration has already been applied," Winslow says. "There wouldn't really be anything they would have to make an adjustment for."

"This was a very strong selling point," says Alex Stark, the New York City-based feng shui consultant whom Tarragon hired to work on both projects. With the Trio project, he says he helped to design not only the building, but also the showroom, according to feng shui principles.

Stark, who is a graduate of the Yale University School of Architecture and worked as an architect for 20 years before starting his feng shui practice 10 years ago, says he worked with the New York City-based architectural teams of Gruzen Samton LLP and WalkerGroup for One Hudson Park, and Architectura of Edgewater and Boston-based MY Stu-



Winslow says Asian buyers prefer houses built with feng shui principles.

dio on Trio, advising them on what errors and problems to avoid.

At One Hudson Park, a 16-story glass and brick tower that is scheduled for completion in the spring, Stark suggested switching the locations of the primary and secondary entrances so the main entrance would face north, toward an inner courtyard. Its original southward orientation faced a retirement home. This change will give residents more privacy and create more peaceful surroundings, with views of a garden in the courtyard, a park and the Hudson River, he says.

Stark also recommended making the lobby entrance from the lower-level parking garage more attractive and elegant because most residents who drive will enter from there. "In feng shui, one of the key rules is that the entrance to your home is critical to your success," he says. "Entering off a garage into a lackluster basement lobby didn't make any sense." WalkerGroup, one of the project's interior designers, ended up reworking the design to create a two-story lobby that will bring more light into the building, says Stark.

Similar principles were applied during the design process for Trio. Plans were revised to assure that the main entrances to Trio's three nine-story condominium buildings would not line up with the back doors. The reason for that, Stark says, is that being able to see the back door from the front door generates stress. He also tweaked apartment layouts so that the bathrooms would not be visible from the front door and kitchen stoves would face the rest of the apartment.

Tarragon has sold more than 75 percent of the 168 one to three-bedroom units at One Hudson. Two-bedroom, 1,145-square-foot homes start at

\$699,880; three-bedroom, 1,585-square-foot units have a starting price of \$1.25 million.

Trio's 196 units range from 742 square feet to 1,751 square feet, and cost between \$409,000 to more than \$1 million for a two-bedroom pent-house. More than 50 percent of the homes in the first building have been sold.

Aside from helping to sell homes, feng shui has broad appeal from a pure design standpoint. "There is a flow to the space that does make sense from a design perspective," says Winslow. "It's a design-enhancing principle."

"It's definitely had an influence on the way we think and the designs we do in development projects," says Lloyd Rosenberg, president of DMR Architects in Hasbrouck Heights. Rosenberg first became interested in the practice after working with a feng shui expert on residential projects in Beijing and Hangzhou, China, in 2002. Some of his staff have received training in feng shui and incorporated its ideas into DMR's design projects, including Lincoln Property Cos.' transit-oriented development in Montclair that will include 165 luxury apartments.

Rosenberg says feng shui is a good fit for his firm and the work it does. "It's sort of a natural evolution as we're getting into more environmentally friendly buildings," he says. With feng shui, "you get more sunlight, you get more air and light around the building."

Rosenberg and his company aren't the only architects interested in feng shui. A book called "Feng Shui: A Practical Guide for Architects and Designers," which was published by Kaplan Publishing last year, was co-authored by a member of the American Institute of Architects. "A lot of architects have been studying feng shui themselves," says Stark. "Feng shui schools have also started getting architects as part of their student body."

All of this activity represents a shift in attitude on the part of architects. "The interesting thing is the invitations from architecture firms," says Stark. "I've become a regular lecturer. Five years ago, architects would have scoffed at the idea of feng shui." ♦

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