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THE RADAR REALTY!



BY STACY SHOEMAKER RAUEN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN DOLE AND AMY K. FELLOWS

GIVE 'EM HILL From left: Lisa Wilson-Wirth in her sleek Arclinea showroom; the new West Laurel condo; inside the fresh Avenue 5 restaurant.

BANKING ON IT *Move ovah, East Village! Bankers Hill is S.D.'s newest 'it' hood with developers unveiling bold designs and the chic contingent setting up shop*

In Bankers Hill, if real estate is any indication, the flight path has officially become a moot issue in this historic and on-the-up neighborhood.

"Local people say, 'What flight path?'" says Jim Greer, an agent with Ascent Real Estate, who points to Park Laurel, Alicante and Laurel Bay as some of the area's most exciting new projects. "In the last 10 years, an awful lot has happened—some very luxurious, large square footage condos and some upscale restaurants and nightlife we haven't seen for a while."

The boldest yet is Bankers Hill Green. Touting itself as S.D.'s first "green" for-sale residential project, the 10-unit, box-style modern building proves that eco-friendly can be good-looking. Think solar panels; windscoops to recycle air; generous landscaping and outdoor spaces; and expansive windows. In fact the facade will blend in perfectly with modernist apartment buildings like Henry Hester's famed Salomon Apartments.

The other B' Hill buzz is swirling around the 14-floor residential tower Mi Arbolito ("My Little Tree"), opening across the street from Balboa Park, which will raise the bar on luxurious living in the area with its one-unit-per-floor layout. Martinez + Cutri Corp.—the local firm behind other influential properties like M2i and The Mark—is decking out the nearly 2,300-square-foot condos with floor-to-ceiling windows, fireplaces, Italian porcelain tiles, exposed brick, wraparound balconies, and stainless steel appliances. And developers CLB and architects Tucker Sadler are enhancing the presence of the neighborhood's anchor, St. Paul's Cathedral, by expanding the church, redoing the historic Le Moderne apartments into long-term affordable housing, and adding two new condo buildings.

With the flurry of development, some residents are trying to take

a step back to define Bankers Hill's look. And perhaps its boundaries. Ask five people where Bankers Hill starts and ends, and you get five different answers. In fact, the area's community association is called Bankers Hill/Park West and two of its members are the ones attempting to "create an identity that is unique to the area," says Glen Schmidt, president of his namesake design firm, which has called Bankers Hill home for 20 years, and is working on a beautification plan including landscaping, lighting, signage, and street furnishings. "I am excited about the development in the area, but there also needs to be an aesthetic plan," Schmidt says.

Also pushing the design envelope is the area's bustling restaurant scene. Institutions like Mister As and Laurel are being faced with a slew of new competition, from Modus' indoor-outdoor space and Avenue 5's neighborhood feel to Tractor Room's speakeasy atmosphere. Heck, even a new sushi eatery is on its way. In fact, Tractor Room owner and S.D. native Johnny Rivera banked on the area eons ago, opening Hash House when it was a sleepy residential area. "It was a gamble at that point. There was nothing south of us," he remembers. "Now, this would be considered a hotspot. One hundred forty condos are opening across the street, with three more restaurant spaces. The face [of Bankers Hill] is going to change in two years."

Having lived in L.A. and N.Y., designer Lisa Wilson-Wirth hand-picked Park Laurel to open her sleek showroom for Arclinea, the Maserati of kitchen furniture, which has stamped celeb approval from Brad Pitt and Donna Karan. The only other SoCal location is at the Pacific Design Center. "We needed to be in a neighborhood that was at the level of our brand," she says. "There's so much potential with the amount of architects and designers in the area." ■