

Loft LIVING

Downsizing boomer-style is taking more and more of us to cities, trading empty nest for loft aeries.

By *Lucie B. Amundsen*

When the need for the big house and the great school system is past, more and more baby-boomers are not just trading in the minivan for flashier wheels, but parking those new wheels in front of hipper digs. Loft conversions—from warehouses to old factories and schools—provide wide-open spaces, high ceilings, and locations that give easy access to a city-living lifestyle.

And it's not just New York's SoHo lifestyle any more; conversions can be found in virtually every city, large or small, from the old LifeSavers factory in Port Chester, New York and The Corset Factory in Norwalk, Connecticut to a plethora of options, from old textile mills to an old paper factory, in Los Angeles.

Ed and Kris Eide, both in their early 50s, shed their suburban Minnesota nest in favor of an über-hip urban Minneapolis warehouse loft. Their Bassett Creek Lofts unit features heavy steel doors on exposed rolling tracks and concrete everything—walls, ceilings, floors. While much of the space

is open, there are private bedrooms—including one for anticipated grandchildren. With a super downtown view, there is no doubt: This space has edge.

“Ed wanted to move into one of these places ever since he saw the Tom Hanks movie *Big* with a basketball hoop hanging somewhere in the living room,” explains Kris Eide. “We have been working toward this for a long time. But we were the typical suburban folks raising our kids, playing ball, going to church.”

The Eides are not suffering a midlife crisis—or if they are, they're not alone. Trends are showing a surge in loft living among baby boomers; while lofts are popular with people in their 20s and 30s, a full one-third of loft purchasers are in their 50s and 60s. Kim Ferrel, a real estate agent specializing in warehouse lofts and a new resident in one herself, says, “People are tired of porcelain, carpet and hardwood floors. They want the rawness of glass and steel. They want the impact of a city view.”



Kris and Ed Eide in their renovated loft in downtown Minneapolis

DOWNTOWN LIVING

The mantra of time efficiency and simplicity is heard in many conversations with urban “lofters.” Downtown living, for starters, allows the shedding of a car or two, along with the concomitant expenses. And many commercial-building conversions have the added convenience of retail space on the ground floor; for example, Santee Court, a former textile factory in downtown L.A., requires only an elevator ride to get from your unit to a dry cleaners, food market, drug store and food court.

Carl Schneider and his wife, Mary Ellen, live in the culturally active portion of Philadelphia's downtown known as Center City. The couple spent most of their adult lives in a Philadelphia suburb until recently buying a 3,500-square-foot condo in a renovated 1920s office building, now

called The Lanesborough. Walking for daily errands to a cluster of locally owned shops has allowed the couple to pare down to one vehicle. “Really, I don’t know why we didn’t do this sooner,” says Carl Schneider.

Kris Eide also applauds the simplicity of her new lifestyle. “In the morning, Ed buys me a coffee at Starbucks and walks me to the bus stop—it’s kind of like a date. It has been a period of rediscovery for us as we get to know each other all over again in the half-hour walk we do every day.”

The Eides used to drive into downtown Minneapolis to have dinner and enjoy their season theatre tickets. “We didn’t really like sitting at the show with a full stomach, so we’d have a late-night dinner. We couldn’t have a bottle of wine because we had a half-hour drive to get home. We said to each other, ‘If we lived downtown, we could just walk,’ and now that’s just what we do,” says Kris Eide.

GREAT FOR GRANDS

The Schneiders find they have more contact with family since their move. “I have two grandchildren, 1½ and 5, and we actually live closer to them now,” says Carl Schneider. “I walk early in the morning and visit my kids’ home. There are many open spaces and parks in the city. We don’t miss having a yard at all.”

The Eides made sure they will be able to enjoy the pitter-patter of little feet on their modern concrete condo floors without violating any association by-laws. “Our building rules and regulations do not preclude children and we made sure we have a two-bedroom unit with grandchildren in mind. And I think that the more ‘hip’ grandparents become, grandchildren will not be expecting big back yards, swingsets and picnic tables,” says Kris Eide. Grandparents who live in a city can give



The Court Press Building, South Boston

their suburban grandchildren the best of both worlds.

Allan Domb, a developer in Pennsylvania, says there is an exodus from the suburbs of those looking for a convenient and gratifying lifestyle. “Boomers are selling their homes in the suburbs at a remarkable rate. And we are seeing a huge trend of two and even three condos per couple—one in downtown, one at the shore, and a third in Florida.” The movement is confirmed by the National Association of Realtors, which shows a tripling of second-home purchases in recent years.

Dom Lange, sales manager of Boston’s Court Square Press and Macallen buildings, describe his boomer buyers as very sophisticated consumers. “They are more educated on housing options and tend to

understand the value of ‘green construction’. Also they’re attracted to the buildings’ contemporary touches like exposed timber and brick.”

The Macallen building, which is still under development, has currently sold a solid 25 percent of future units to empty-nesters. This demographic tends to appreciate the condo’s proximity to excellent public transportation, which can vastly simplify a lifestyle. Lange said, “We are only one subway stop from downtown Boston. It doesn’t get much easier than that.”

Whether you’re interested in walking to a museum, doing your food shopping in your own building, having an open-plan home layout, or simply investing in a city pied-a-terre, don’t think that lofts are just for trendy young folk—they only make you feel that way! ■

More info

For additional information on properties mentioned in this article, contact the following:

Bassett Creek Lofts, Minneapolis, www.bclofts.com, 612-541-8070

The Corset Factory, Norwalk, sales@stonewoodcondos.com, 203-854-5306

Court Square Press Building, Boston, www.courtsquarepress.com, 617-482-3394

The Lanesborough Building, Philadelphia, www.lanesboroughcondo.com, 215-545-1500

Lifesavers Landmark Condominium, Port Chester, through Rye/Port Chester NY real estate agencies

The Macallen Building, Boston, www.themacallenbuilding.com, 617-482-3394

Santee Court, Los Angeles, lofts@santeecourt.com, 213-623-8101