

MODEL HOME: 200 Second Street, Oakland

TINY, BUT TRENDY Jack London Square condos are a good fit

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Architect **David Baker**'s name has come to be associated with smart and affordable urban design, and so a tour of 200 Second Street in Oakland begins with high expectations. That the biggest challenge has been met becomes apparent when a patio door slides open and the roar of a construction generator outside fills the interior: With doors and windows closed, the unit is an oasis of peace.

That's a big deal in lively (translation from sales-speak: noisy) Jack London Square, where residential buildings continue to rise and Amtrak trains continue to rumble. What's also a big deal is the smallest deal of all at 200 Second Street, an "alcove one-bedroom" unit of between 563 and 602 square feet that's so cleverly designed and so well priced (\$375,000 and up) that single, first-time home buyers are snapping these up as soon as they are released.

Fortunately, these four floor plans comprise one-third of the 75 units in this six-story structure, which includes four live-work units on the ground floor and one garaged parking spot per unit. Part of the garage will house a City CarShare location; with the ferry just a few blocks away and more and more services coming into the area, it's not beyond imagination that one car will suffice for even residents of the two-bedroom units.

The exterior of the building is modern and inviting, with glass staircases and elevators, and though common space doesn't abound, there will be two nicely landscaped courtyards, according to project representative Graeme Cohen.

Alcove one-bedroom buyers will need those because although the building's bigger units come with patios or decks, the smaller plans come with no outside space. The biggest of the four alcove plans, the A3, does have a pop-out bay that better connects to the outside (with three windows instead of just one) and also expands the living/dining area.

Now, some might call the alcove one-bedroom unit a junior one-bedroom -- maybe even, in some circles, a studio. But even at 563 square feet, the high-ceilinged units feel more homelike than some of the suburban apartment-to-condo projects on the market today. The front door is flanked by a small storage room on one side and a large, tile and limestone bathroom with shower-tub on the other. Inside the bathroom, a door conceals the compact washer and dryer.

Just past the storage and bathroom is an all-electric galley kitchen with granite counters and stainless appliances, and with Studio Becker cabinetry. Opposite, the slightly elevated bedroom may be visible over a shelving unit that may have the optional glass shoji doors; paired with the Studio Becker cabinetry, these give the design an Asian feel.

Beyond the kitchen are the dining area and living room, and the two steps to the open bedroom. A large walk-in closet holds plenty in the space between the bedroom and the bathroom.

The concept is similar to the loft designs that made **Baker + Partners** famous in the Bay Area, except that one need not negotiate a flight of stairs to get to the bedroom. The bed-to-bath journey requires a few steps, but the hidden washer-dryer in the space where there could have been a second bathroom entry makes that a worthwhile sacrifice. The first-time home buyer who puts 20 percent down and borrows \$300,000 or so can beat the monthly rental of similar apartments in the neighborhood; \$340 covers the monthly homeowner fees of water, garbage, insurance and maintenance.

The one-bedroom units with den, at 740 to 900 square feet, seem palatial and all have deck, balcony or patio beyond French or sliding glass doors. Starting in the \$450,000s, these all have a good-size den and U-shaped kitchen flanking the entry, with the bedroom and living room on the window side.

Two-bedroom units, starting at 1,133 square feet and in the \$640,000s, also have dens. These are situated on building corners, so two sides have windows -- a major plus considering that the building has no air conditioning and could get quite toasty during a heat wave.

The five airy three-bedroom units on the building's northeast corner -- none of which had been sold, or even priced, at press time -- come with flexible floor plans that developers intend to complete only when there's a buyer. There could be dual master bedrooms, for instance, or a really gigantic master suite with a den or sitting area. At 1,525 square feet on one level, the three-bedrooms have 2 1/2 bathrooms; the master bathrooms have a separate tub and shower.

With the priciest of the two-bedroom units at about \$657,000, nearly \$200,000 more than most of the one-bedrooms, bet on paying at least \$800,000 for a three-bedroom. That's the part of the condo market where homes aren't moving quickly, however, so it will be interesting to see how developer Metrovation handles this. They won't be able to rent them out; one of the requirements of purchasing at 200 Second Street is that owners live in their units for at least a year before they could put them on the rental market. Maybe they can figure out how to turn those three-bedrooms into more alcove one-bedrooms.

All of the models have the optional Plyboo (bamboo laminate) floors, so we didn't see the standard vinyl in the others. Bedrooms all have carpeting.

Unit pricing varies widely based as much on location as size; for instance, those along the back of the first floor (the floor above street level) will open onto the landscaped courtyard area and will have the feel of garden apartments. Those on the front side might catch more noise from the nearby train traffic and will be priced accordingly.

With all the single, first-time homeowners moving in, it seems a shame that **Baker + Partners** didn't work in some social space where the newcomers could meet. They'll have to venture out to one of the neighborhood cafes instead. But, hey, there's plenty happening around Jack London Square, even if you can't hear it from the inside at 200 Second Street.

200 Second Street , Oakland
Developer: Metrovation
Architect: **David Baker + Partners**
Price: Starting at \$375,800
Square footage: About 563
Price per square foot: About \$667
Bedrooms: 1
Bathrooms: 1
Parking: 1 car
Monthly dues: \$340
Web: www.200second.com