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CALIFORNIA : CITY BEAT

Above it all in Hollywood

For those in the Residences at the W penthouses, there's no need ever to come in contact with the area's grittier realities

May 19, 2013 | Nita Lelyveld

They keep saying that Hollywood is being transformed.

They keep talking up new places to dwell and shop and dine.

On the boulevard, such change can seem spotty and slight: Tourists still look nonplused as they try to sync image and reality.

Stores along the Walk of Fame still skew toward glass water pipes, thigh-high vinyl boots and "World's Greatest Cousin" souvenir statuettes. Just west of Vine, you still find the sign advertising girls: "Totally Nude, Totally Naakt, Totalement Nue, Benar-Benar Bugil."

And in front of the W Hollywood, Lowell Taylor's still doing what he's done for 20 years, bending over a trash bin and reaching in deep for cans and bottles to toss into his shopping cart.

But that's down low, zooming in. Go up high. Zoom out.

You see hills. You see the Hollywood sign. You see Capitol Records, curb to clouds.

Up high, life on the boulevard recedes.

You don't just see construction cranes and developers' dreams.

You see the new Hollywood as if it actually exists.

And maybe it does -- as much as it needs to -- for a certain clientele who can afford to have the outside world brought to them in their aeries.

That's the target demographic for the penthouses of the Residences at the W Hollywood,

priced from \$1 million to ... \$45 million (with additional monthly homeowners dues of \$1 per square foot).

Three years ago, when the Residences opened next door to the W Hotel, the economy was in the tank. A year in, only 10 of its 143 units had sold.

Now 85 have, and Ron Barnes, the director of sales and marketing, says the time is right to woo high-end buyers for the rooms at the top.

The luxury condo building is 15 stories high, which means something, for now anyway, in low-slung Hollywood.

On the top three floors are the penthouses.

Windows are floor-to-ceiling. Views are sweeping. The living is

At least that's the message of the passion-red brochure titled "51 Things Home Can Do," with its photos of a handsome couple -- smiling in bed, uncorking wine in their sleek kitchen.

It suggests ways they might choose to spend their time, only about a fifth of which involve leaving the W complex.

22: "Rise and shine whenever. Breakfast 24/7."

25: "Revisit the Kama Sutra together on your wenge-stained plank hardwood flooring."

44: "Order up the penne puttanesca at midnight. And the chocolate souffle at 2."

Living in the Residences means having a Metro stop at your door, although there's no requirement to use it.

It technically means living on the boulevard too, although there's no need to set foot on it.

Like guests at the hotel, residents drive into an interior courtyard off Argyle Street, where parking attendants whisk their cars away and paparazzi can't lie in wait.

That's a selling point, says Barnes, who is proud that a major star lived at the Residences for four months without anyone being the wiser.

In the lobby, called the Living Room, fruit-infused ice water awaits, as does a 24-hour concierge desk.

Groceries can be brought in, a party catered, a private plane reserved last-minute for Vegas.

Concierges can arrange for discounted dining or spa treatments at the hotel.

They can get a pooch groomed and walked, and like its humans, it never has to set paws to public pavement.

The rooftop features an outdoor kitchen, a garden, a pool with cabanas and a well-equipped gym -- in addition to a dog run with artificial grass, and fine, close-up views of Hollywood's vintage rooftop signs.

To help buyers see the penthouses' possibilities, designers have decorated in a variety of styles -- boho chic, red-carpet swanky, eco-recycled-wood-meets-industrial urban loft.

Those model homes share a hallway on the 12th floor.

The biggest prize shares nothing. The 15th floor is being sold as one 25,000-square-foot sky mansion.

The \$45-million price tag covers architect Richard Robertson III's plans for a four-bedroom showpiece complete with ballroom, screening room, trophy room, fitness center and beauty parlor. The master suite is close to 4,000 square feet.

Right now it's raw space -- exposed pipes and insulation.

But don't zoom in. Stand on a balcony and zoom out.

From the 15th floor you can see the ocean and the downtown skyline. The whole city lies before you, not just the bearded, barefoot man you happen to have gazed down upon, lurching at a precarious angle on the boulevard's pink terrazzo stars.

Leave him to those who exist below. Let them walk past him to the new Trader Joe's or the 24-hour Walgreens that serves sushi.

The 15th-floor penthouse will have a commercial kitchen, which the concierge can stock.

So what if it hasn't been built yet? It comes with 17 valet parking spots.

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