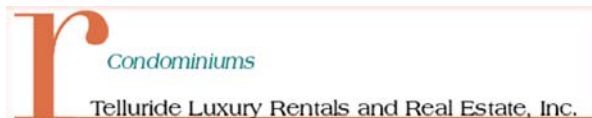




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News

Wednesday, March 12, 2008

A glimpse inside some of the town's finest houses

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Brokers' Open Tour offers a chance to gape

By Reilly Capps

The Town of Telluride Brokers Open Tour is this town's version of Denver's Parade of Homes.

It's a broker's chance to get an inside look at the listings of others. And, for curious members of the public, it's an opportunity to size up what houses in town are like, what they might cost per square foot, how the sun hits them on the sunny side, in the shade, with a deck, two-car garage, etc.

And, truthfully, it's a chance to enter the homes - and very nearly the lives - of other people and take a snoop around.

I toured 10 houses on the bright Wednesday morning, and was repeatedly impressed by the fact that there is no "average" house here. Everything is so different, from simple one- and two-bedrooms to ultra-modern six-bath houses.

The spanking-new house at 555 Pandora bills itself as "high-tech Telluride," and it doesn't disappoint. Like a new Mercedes, it has keyless entry. Like the CNN studios, there are flat screens on seemingly every wall and in every corner. The lights are operated by a matrix-like keypad. This is the home for the dedicated technophile or, quite possibly, Captain Kirk.

On top of that it boasts countertops made of quartz, which are apparently even harder than granite, and a heated towel rack that dries the towels quicker and keeps them warm for when you step out of the steam shower.

The coup de grace: the whole top floor, all of it, with a heated deck and natural wood from floor to ceiling, is set aside for a Swedish soaking tub so deep you wonder if you would ever want to get out. The only hitch the listing agent noted about the set-up is that house's elevator does not run to the fifth floor, and so if you want to get to the soaking tub, you have to climb stairs.

The highest priced house on the tour is listed at \$6,995,000, the Tommy Hein-designed blue structure at 135 E. Columbia. It's clear that Hein left no detail unattended. A waterfall greets you as you enter the house, water trickling down marble imported from Carrera, Italy. The Carrera marble recurs throughout the house, along with Honduras mahogany floors and nickel-plated sinks. "This is probably as nice as town gets," said agent Bill Fandel.

The new house at 120 Tomboy Road has what agent Sandy Sucharski calls "a deck like being in an airplane." You're so high above town you can see almost to Utah, and there's a deck off every single room on this multi-level, almost Escher-like house.

Builders and homeowners often complain about the regulations laid down by the Historic and Architectural Review Commission, the town board that has to approve your designs and make houses fit in with the old mining-era houses.

People call the commission overbearing, restrictive and even communist. Who is HARC to tell me how to build my house? they wonder.

But the HARC regulations actually help to improve the town. These houses aren't the opulent palaces you see other places, with 20 bathrooms and living rooms the size of Madison Square Garden, the kind of house where, if you want to tell your kid that dinner's ready, you have to use the intercom.

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HARC keeps houses down to a human scale, and they end up better, friendlier, and more livable because of it.

Some houses, usually older ones, are naturally more modest, without granite countertops or elevators. One house I toured was clearly the kind of place where somebody with a full life really lives. A three-bedroom, one-bath bungalow with a surfboard leaning against a wall, books by Umberto Eco and a battery charger for the inevitable occasional car trouble. "Course, it's a sign of the real estate market in Telluride that even modest-sized homes owned by surfers with car problems list for \$1.7 million.

At least one house appeared to be doomed. The house at 226 North Pine has, as its most saleable feature, the fact that you can tear it down.

Because Telluride is a National Historic District, many houses are protected from demolition, so "perfect tear down" is a big selling point. You can almost imagine the house-hunting trips taken by couples just looking for something to tear down: "Honey, look at those cute dormer windows! Wouldn't they look fantastic getting crushed by a wrecking ball?!"

The young realtor inside the house - or possibly he was a realtor's assistant - pitched the house as best he could, noting the downstairs washer/dryer, but he might as well be standing in the House of Usher.

But the best house I saw, for my money, sits at 224 North Pine, the most appealing combination of architecture, decoration, and amenities.

It looks almost average from the outside, tasteful, fitting in perfectly with the surroundings, its slanted roof echoing the peaks of Ajax and Telluride when viewed from across the street. But it's so bright and spacious on the inside, you feel like you're in one of those short stories where a magical house is freakishly bigger on the inside than on the outside.

It's not surprising that, along with Ron Bercovitz, Hein had a hand in designing this house. Owned and lived in by Mike and Jill Wentworth, the house reflects extremely creative, colorful and sensible taste. A gorgeous green abstract painting by Jill graces the two-story family room, and her mixed media collage hangs in the front hall. This is clearly the home of artistic people.

Its dining room is one you'd want to eat in every day. The combination of stainless steel, marble and wood in the kitchen offer a lively tableau. The kids' rooms have big lofts and cloud-painted ceilings. And everywhere in the house the screens are flat, the beds fat, and the tubs deep.

Like a great number of other houses on the tour, it's the kind of place anyone would love to call home.

Or, if not that, at least to peak inside for a morning or so.

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