

## Best New Infill



### SUTTER BROWNSTONES

**Location:** N Street, between 26th and 27th streets, Sacramento  
**Developer:** LoftWorks LLC  
**Contractor:** Walsh & Forster  
**Architect:** LPA Sacramento  
**Engineer:** ZFA Structural Engineers  
**Size:** 28 units, 32,000 square feet total  
**Cost:** \$10 million

# Sutter Brownstones

The easy way out would have been an apartment building.

LoftWorks LLC had been hired to replace 32 homes that were wiped out by the expansion of Sutter Medical Center in midtown Sacramento. The site measured only 30,000 square feet — less than an acre.

But the surrounding neighborhood was mostly single-family homes, and LoftWorks wanted its Sutter Brownstones infill project to continue that tradition. After three successful rental loft projects, the partnership decided to build for-sale housing.

STORY BY

**ROBERT CELASCHI**

PHOTOS BY

**DENNIS MCCOY**

The partners managed to make the numbers fit: 28 free-standing residential

buildings in four rows. The homes are all two-bedroom and two-bathroom, ranging from 1,119 square feet to 1,966 square feet. Four of them have granny flats to bring the total to 32.

"LoftWorks: Those guys get it," judge Adam Nelson said. "I've heard a lot over the last few years about how the city wants to bring more people

to live in the midtown-downtown area. This was really the first project I have seen that seemed like it really fit with Sacramento."

The buildings are "brownstones" only in the sense that they are tightly packed, vertical homes fronting on an urban street. Instead of heavy brownstone, however, the architecture features clean lines of brick and glass. They won't be mistaken for contemporaries of the nearby Victorians.

"My partners and I are really committed modernists, and we were developing in the middle of an important historic neighborhood," LoftWorks partner Mark Friedman said. "I think we came up with some compromises that not only met the needs of the neighborhood, but met our own aesthetic judgment."

As part of the basic problem of space, LoftWorks had to figure out where to put parking. Every unit has a space on-site, and every homebuyer can rent an additional space in the Sutter Garage about a block away. Yet the parking is hidden along the alley or underneath the homes, invisible from all but four of the 32 units.

"One of the things that impressed the group the most was the very intricate distribution of patterns of traffic," judge Tyler Babcock said.

By putting parking underneath, LoftWorks also solved a common challenge for midtown homes: how to create a separation between the public and private spaces along the street. A fence is the easiest way, Friedman said, but the least friendly.

As built, Sutter Brownstones has two courtyards that are raised about eight feet above street level. Doors and windows from two buildings open onto each courtyard. While directly across from one another the units have slightly different elevations — seven steps up from the courtyard on one side, four on the other.

"People understand that they don't belong



The Sutter Brownstones are two-bedroom and two-bathroom homes. Some have a media room downstairs. All of the homes have kitchens with high-end appliances, top. Large windows and high ceilings bring a lot of light and a sense of space into the homes, which are tightly packed on a small site, above.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11



The homes at Sutter Brownstones open onto two courtyards separated from the street with a short flight of steps. The patios give the project a sense of community, but the detached homes offer some privacy as well. The judges liked the project's "natural separation" from the sidewalk.

FROM PAGE 10

in the courtyard unless they are a guest. And that perception is reinforced by all the windows facing the courtyard," Friedman said of any safety concerns.

"The hardscaped court respects the traditions of midtown, said judge Etienne Louw, balancing a sense of community yet a good sense of privacy.

"It could be a very awkward space, but in this case it was so successful it created

this wonderful sense of community and neighborhood," Babcock said. "It has a natural separation from the street in the small run of stair."

Inside, large windows bring in lots of daylight.

"It really changes the scale of the room. You walk in and don't feel like it's a bunch of small bedrooms," Babcock said.

The interior look of Sutter Brownstones came from blankblank, a Sacramento design studio that also staged the models.

"In the residential projects we have done, we have always brought in an interior designer. It is such an important part of the design of your home," Friedman said. Too often production homes avoid strong design elements, he said.

"As a result you end up with things that tend toward blandness because you don't want to offend anyone. We decided to take some risks and put in what we like," he said.

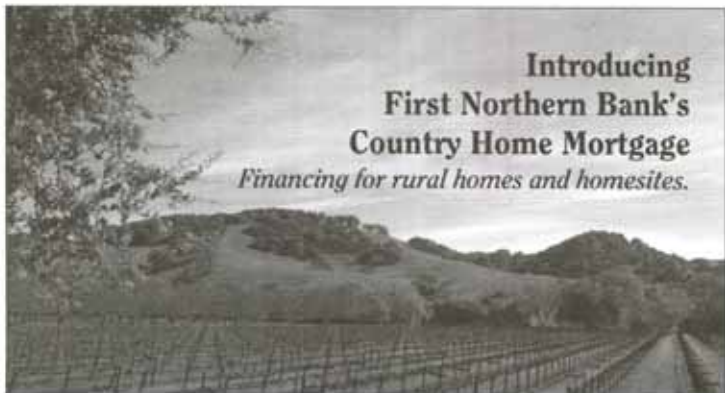
LoftWorks sold 18 of the 28 units between its April opening and the end of the year. That's a strong showing in the dismal real estate market that has enveloped Sacramento, but Friedman noted that the homes were priced to sell, listing from \$385,000 to \$625,000.

"We're not making money on them, but we are not losing any either," he said.

In the course of evaluating projects, the judges would tour a site and then exchange views as they were driven to the next site. Sutter Brownstones instantly went to the top of their lists.

"It was one of the few projects that we saw this year that after we got on the bus, everybody agreed that it was just a little bit above its competition," Nelson said.

If all infill projects were this well thought out, said judge Samantha Kersting. "We'd be sitting pretty right now."



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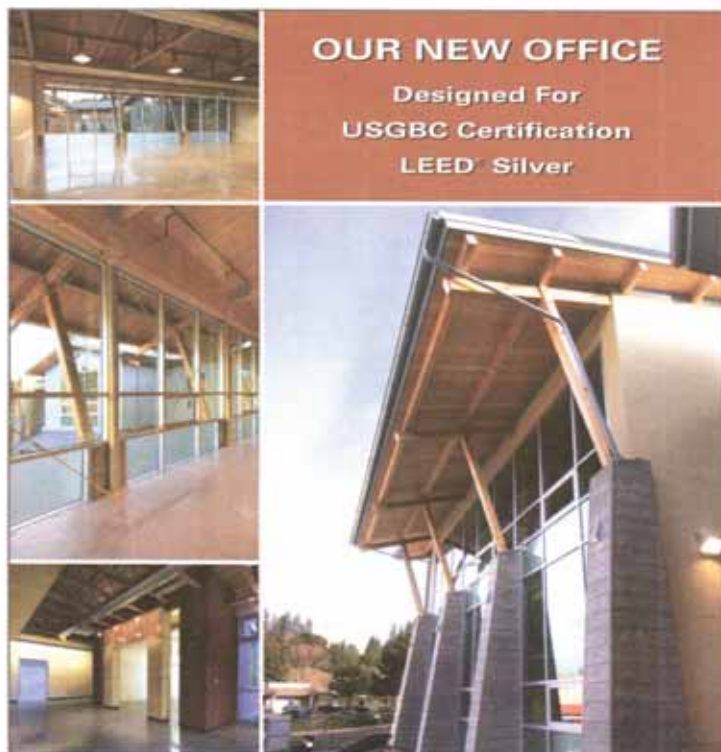
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# 2600 Capitol



Adding wood elements to what had essentially been a glass and metal cube design, top, got the neighborhood on board for 2600 Capitol. The developers worked closely with residents to build a project that would fit into the neighborhood. Balconies, above, allow for outdoor space on each floor.

**L**oftWorks LLC listened to both the real estate market and the neighborhood in developing the office building at 2600 Capitol Ave.

The result, said the judges, is a four-story structure of mostly glass and steel that fits well into an area dominated by wooden homes built early in the 20th century.

"You would think a contemporary office building would feel out of place in that setting," judge Tyler Babcock said. Instead, the building looks like it has been part of the neighborhood for a long time.

The five-year-old LoftWorks built its reputation on urban housing, and that was the original idea for the corner of 26th Street and Capitol. But the housing market was

STORY BY

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**DENNIS McCOY**

getting weak, and LoftWorks already was working on the 32-unit Sutter Brownstones project only a block away.

The partners — Mike Heller Jr., Mark Friedman, Glenn Sorenson and Randy Boehm — then decided to speculate with a modern, Class A office building. Heller took the lead. Through his Heller Pacific Co. he's already been a winner in the Real Estate Projects of 2007 competition with his Midtown Art Retail & Restaurant Scene building, more popularly known as MARRS.

But there were also the neighbors to contend with. The corner was part of the Sutter Medical Center master plan, and some neighbors were already irritated at the amount of construction going on in the area. They certainly didn't want something added that would "stick out like a spaceship," as judge Adam Nelson put it.

LoftWorks worked to get the neighbors on board through at least a half-dozen meetings. While the developers made the final decisions, some of the ideas originated with neighbors. The developers scaled back plans for a full-service restaurant, but still included space for a neighborhood coffee shop or deli.

"The biggest galvanizing design issue that got everyone on board was the addition of the wood," Heller said. One of Heller's own suggestions, the wide band of dark wood forms an asymmetrical frame from the second floor to the roof, but blocks almost none of the view from inside. It softens the look of what otherwise would be a light green glass cube.

"It's still modern, but it now looks like it has been there for years," Heller said.

The outreach made a strong impression on the judges.

"It's an office building that really fits into a mixed midtown area that has a lot of residential," judge John Hodgson said. "It's a good example of somebody spending the time to get it right."

LoftWorks also took a calculated risk, building the spec office with a goal of getting Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. Some of the features include;

- A light-colored roof to reflect heat;

## Judges' Choice



### 2600 CAPITOL

**Location:** 2600 Capitol Ave., Sacramento

**Developer:** LoftWorks LLC

**Contractor:** AP Thomas

**Architect:** Lionakis

**Engineer:** Miyamoto International

**Size:** 55,000 square feet

**Cost:** \$6.5 million



## LIBRARY | 'Living room' for the neighborhood

FROM PAGE 20

to people using the fields and facilities around the building.

Having different city departments with different priorities made the project more complex than normal for Williams + Paddon Architects + Planners Inc.

The city helped by forming a team with representatives of Parks & Recreation, Roseville Electric and the media department.

"They came together to make this one thing a really good venture," said Naaz Alikhan, a principal in Williams + Paddon's interior environments group.

It helped that each portion is separated from the others, with a common gathering area at the front of the building as a focal point, she said.

"The cool thing about it is the gathering space right outside. We kind of designed it as the living room for the community that lives on this side of Roseville," Alikhan said.

The decor also has some whimsy. The Reading Tree is realistic enough with its plastic trunk and silk leaves, but it also has lights on it in the shape of bugs and birds. The wall covering behind it looks like the sky, while carpet tile on the floor mimics the look of grass.

"Being young is all about a world of wonder. That's what we wanted to create," Alikhan said. "I love the space."



With so much information available at home via the Internet, it's easy to assume people are using libraries less and less, she said. By creating a fun, active space where computers are as easily accessible as books are, Roseville is offering the best of both worlds.

As befits a building with exhibits on sustainable practices, the building is aiming for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.



A lot of natural light is brought into the library, far left. The building is aiming for LEED Gold certification. The children's area, left, includes a Reading Tree with lighted bugs and birds.



## OFFICE | LEED certification is paying off as some tenants are requiring it to move

FROM PAGE 21

- Water-efficient landscaping and restroom fixtures;
- Recycled materials;
- Recycling construction waste;
- A design that lets daylight deep into the interior;
- Storage, showers and changing rooms for people who bike to work.

In all, the green building practices added about 1 percent to the total cost, Heller said.

LEED certification is rare among spec offices, but it is paying off for LoftWorks. "It's tough leasing right now, I can assure you. But we managed to make two significant leases before we finished the shell," Heller said. The two account for about 40 percent of the 55,000 square feet.

Hodgson said he knows the tenants, and both told him LEED certification was among their requirements for space.

The building is very close to judge John Leonard's office, and he watched the project take shape.

"It essentially proves, among other things, that sustainable design and

Green building practices added about 1 percent to the total cost of the spec office building. LoftWorks used recycled materials and added water-efficiency features, storage and showers for cyclists.

construction pencils economically.

The fact that it cost a small additional amount to design, construct and certify is proven out by the fact that it is leasing up quickly," Leonard said. "By having an economic success there, they will get a lot of attention."

The building had stiff competition in the office category, including the U.S. Bank Tower. The judges wanted to make sure 2600 Capitol received special recognition with the Judges' Choice award.

Success with this spec office could mean more buildings like it for Sacramento.

"They said they did it to kind of get their feet wet, and that they would do it again," judge Samantha Kersting said.

That might have to wait awhile, though. Right now the toughest challenge for 2600 Capitol is the general economy, Heller said. He and his partners might not even have tackled this project had they not already secured their loans by the time the economy started to turn bad.

It's worth noting that even when the economic pressure got heavy, LoftWorks didn't abandon LEED certification, said judge Ron Brown.

"They are committed to certain levels of personal requirements," Brown said. "They stick to it all the way through. They don't forego just for profit, and they could have."