

S.F.'s residential towers encase tenants in urban luxury

By **John King** Published 2:26 pm, Tuesday, September 15, 2015



Photo: Stephen Lam, Special To The Chronicle



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Above: The new Azure Apartments look down on Mission Bay. The residential high-rise lures tenants with its appealing extras.

Kristie Locks is making the case for life in Rincon Hill's newest apartment tower, where rents for a 619-square-foot, one-bedroom unit start at \$4,065, and the bells and whistles are state of the art.

There's a refrigerated room off the lobby to store deliveries of fresh groceries. Two "board rooms" can be reserved with seating for eight. A concierge is on duty 24 hours a day. An app lets you pay the rent, tell the valet to retrieve your car, or schedule a dog-walker or an in-room massage.

"This is the new way of living," said Locks, senior leasing agent for the Jasper, which stacks 320 apartments in a 40-story shaft behind the gas station at the entrance to the Bay Bridge. "People love how techie our units are. It's San Francisco!"

The Jasper is one extreme of what I call Extreme Living: the packaged lifestyles being dangled before potential residents of all those buildings taking shape above the streets of the city's northeast corner. We long-timers may resent blocked views, or be dumbfounded by the prices. But the past decade has proved that people who want to live in San Francisco and can afford it — an important distinction — aren't just looking for Victorian charm and bohemian funk. For many of them, modern amenities

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To get a sense of this brave cool world, the one inside many of the buildings I review, I recently visited the marketing centers of three mint-fresh complexes: the Jasper, Lumina and Azure. The first two are among the crop that has sprung up on Rincon Hill since its height limits were raised in 2005 to allow high-rise housing within walking distance of the Financial District. Azure is the latest installment of Mission Bay, a former rail yard that went through decades of planning but took off only after the Giants opened their ballpark in 2000.

Azure is the smallest of the three, 273 apartments filling a 16-story tower along Mission Creek, and it's the one with the shortest list of gilded lures (and the one-bedrooms are priced from \$3,600 — a steal!). Concierge service ends at midnight. There's no screening room for movies or sporting events, not even a sauna. But there is a dog-washing cubby in the parking garage, plus six bicycle storage rooms, and each unit has a washer and dryer. The five-story base enfolds an expansive outdoor common area, where Azure's lounge with its demonstration kitchen spills into an artful terrain that includes three sculptural fountains and a 30-foot-long grilling station: "This is probably what our residents use the most," said [Alex La Flam](#), whose title is community manager.

La Flam and [Corey Warren](#), a vice president of property management for Azure developer Equity Residential, emphasize the sedate tone of Mission Bay compared to more established — but sometimes troublesome — San Francisco neighborhoods. "Mission Bay feels like a suburb in the city," suggested Warren. "It's newer, clean, more quiet."

Rincon Hill doesn't have Mission Bay's parks, or its houseboats in the creek. Locks instead emphasized proximity: to the Embarcadero on foot, to Silicon Valley-bound freeways in a car: "You're out of the hustle and bustle, but you can be in it in two seconds." And views: The interactive features in Locks' office include a tower diagram where she can call up a specific unit on a specific floor with a tap of the finger, and the corresponding view appears as well (residents of the tower built by developer Crescent Heights won't move upstairs until this fall).

Lumina goes Jasper one better: The sales office comes with an 8-foot-tall model illuminated from the inside. You point out where you'd like to be, and a sales agent summons up the panorama that awaits.

But then, the Folsom Street condominium complex is the largest member of the trio, with 656 units. The handful of studios were priced in the high \$700,000s but quickly sold; two-bedroom units on the upper floors begin at \$2.1 million.

Like older sibling Infinity to the east, Lumina places two eight-story podium buildings and a pair of 37- and 42-story towers around a landscaped podium. Beneath the podium are two shared floors, where lobbies and loading docks share space with an array of amenities that will include an upscale market happy to cater private meals for residents in the upstairs dining room or lounge.

Is there a gym? Of course — and it includes a 20-foot-high climbing wall. Is there a screening room? Yes — with raked seating. Is there a pool? You bet — 70 feet long and shaped like an L, so splashing kids won't collide with adults swimming their daily laps.

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“The idea is to make life easy for you,” said **Carl Shannon**, regional manager for Lumina’s developer, **Tishman Speyer**. “We’re not selling the four walls; we’re selling an entire lifestyle.”

Ultimately, these residential complexes offer the vision of an urban life without urban hassles. In the middle of the action, but above all the fuss. Surrounded by cosmopolitan stimulation, but curated for you alone. Where panhandlers and traffic fade from view while an app fulfills your needs.

This isn’t the San Francisco that most of us know, and it has a two-dimensional feel. But it’s taking shape in a hurry — and realistic or not, it’s a new way of life in a city not sure where it might be headed next.

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