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Renowned designer readies condos for F1 crowds

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"It's all about Formula 1."

Next month's inaugural Austin auto race, world-renowned designer Louise Sunshine says, was the driving force behind her eye-popping transformations of three for-sale condos at downtown's posh W Austin Hotel and Residences.

The event will bring well-heeled visitors from across the world to Central Texas – and Beau Armstrong, CEO of Austin-based Stratus Properties, developer of the \$300 million building, said he believes many of them will be in the market for a second home.

That's where Sunshine's three made-over condos at the W come into play.

She teamed with Heather Plimmer, the W's director of design, to select everything – furniture, linens, artwork, lighting and even silverware – making them ready for immediate move-in.

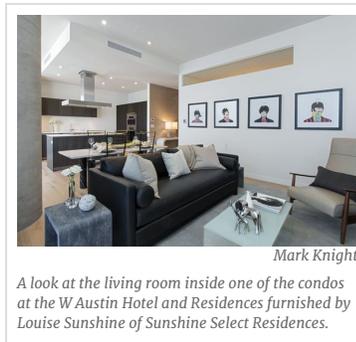
"All they have to do is bring their toothbrush," Sunshine said.

The 37-story building, which opened a little less than two years ago, has 159 condos stacked atop a tony hotel. Residents and guests are offered a variety of services and amenities.

The three redesigned units, on the 18th and 27th floors, range in size from about 900 square feet to 1,700 square feet and are priced from about \$695,000 to \$1.32 million. Three weeks before the race, one is already under contract.

"They are absolutely beautiful," Armstrong said. "The end product speaks for itself."

Sunshine, owner of Sunshine Select Residences, stumbled across the W during a



Mark Knight

A look at the living room inside one of the condos at the W Austin Hotel and Residences furnished by Louise Sunshine of Sunshine Select Residences.



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Mark Knight

The W has 159 condos. A dining area offers a look at the downtown skyline.

recent visit to Austin. The building, she says, immediately impressed her.

“This is first-rate design in a first-rate building,” she said. “No developer puts in these floors. No one puts in windows like this. The fixtures in the bathrooms are first rate.”

Armstrong and Sunshine eventually connected and, a short time later, work was under way to transform the three condos.

“Needless to say, we were very flattered at her interest in the project,” Armstrong said.

The entire process took less than three months, which Sunshine said is “abnormally fast for design.”



Mark Knight

Turn-key residences at the W are expected to appeal to F1 attendees looking for a second home.

“My mind goes everywhere all the time,” she said.

Much of that time was spent searching businesses in Austin – and elsewhere – for one-of-a-kind new and vintage pieces.

“Our buyers are going to be very discriminating,” Sunshine said. “You can’t cheap out.”



W condos remade for F1 visitors

Sunshine said one of her primary goals was to maximize the building’s breathtaking views. The building’s south side fronts Lady Bird Lake. On the north side, condo dwellers are eye to eye with downtown Austin’s skyscrapers.

“Each residence is completely unique and customized,” she said. “Nothing here is cookie-cutter.”

While many Central Texans might not be familiar with Sunshine’s work – the W marks her Austin debut – developers in other parts of the world certainly are. In the United States, she’s handled projects from coast to coast. Abroad, she’s put her touch on buildings in places such as China and Israel.

“I’ve worked with billions of dollars of new construction in my life,” she said.

“Louise is the doyenne of high-dollar residential real estate in Manhattan, with a blue-chip client list,” Armstrong said. “She cut her teeth working for Donald Trump and later built the preeminent residential brokerage firm in New York City.”

Her units have been sold to several big-name celebrities, including Nicole Kidman, Hugh Jackman, Martha Stewart, Vincent Gallo and Calvin Klein. Just recently, one of Sunshine’s residences at the W Hotel in New York’s financial district was leased

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to NBA star Jeremy Lin, she said.

Sunshine said the condos that she made over in Lin's building are going for \$400 per square foot more than comparable unfinished units. An average of seven are selling each month.

"She has a proven theory," Armstrong said. "There is a certain segment of the market that wants a turn-key residence and is willing to pay for that service and convenience."

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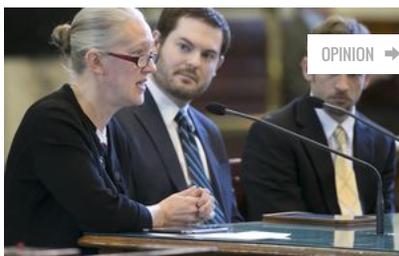
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