

# THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Luxury homebuyers pay a premium for residences with livable outdoor spaces, so architects and builders have become creative in accommodating those preferences.

By Roger Grody

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Livable outdoor space has long been an essential element of luxury residential architecture, so even in areas where land is increasingly scarce, such as revitalized city centers or overdeveloped coastlines, that coveted indoor-outdoor lifestyle is addressed through creative design.

Kathrin Rein, a Keller Williams luxury agent

in Greater Miami, reports that properties with outdoor spaces sell at a premium. "I think a lot of developers are doing a great job in transforming tight spaces into little paradises," Rein says. "If you have a spacious balcony, the indoor-outdoor lifestyle takes on a whole new meaning, and buyers are more willing to sacrifice their single-family homes."

There are few places in the country that are as exciting from both a real estate and lifestyle perspective as San Francisco, but the compact city with extraordinarily high land costs has always forced designers of luxury residences to be creative. At 181 Fremont, where luxury condominiums occupy the upper floors of a lavish 800-foot-tall high-rise in the city's South of

PHOTO COURTESY SWIRE PROPERTIES

Market (SoMa) district, architect Jeffrey Heller has capitalized on the neighborhood's newest recreational asset. Although there are no private balconies, 181 Fremont is loaded with communal recreation space and enjoys direct access to an elevated park above an adjoining transit center, integrating that unexpected greenspace into the lives of the building's residents.

A three-bedroom penthouse at 181 Fremont sold for \$15 million last summer, setting a new price-per-square-foot record (more than \$4,500) for condos in San Francisco, and a full-floor, 6,941-square-foot penthouse was originally listed at \$42 million.

Miami Beach's Eighty Seven Park, a sleek residential tower designed by renowned Italian

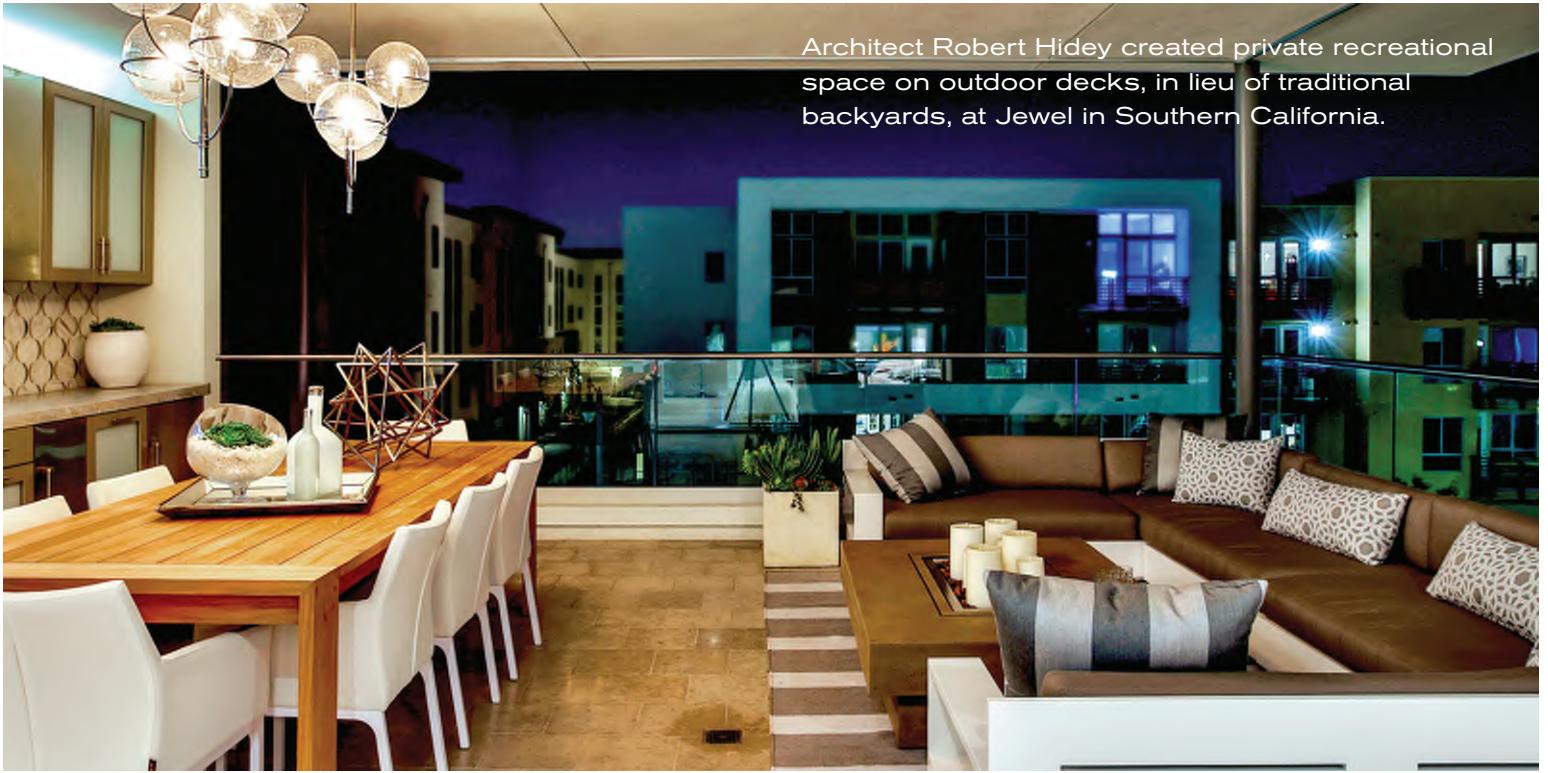
architect Renzo Piano, is slated for completion later this year. Not only will it offer sprawling common areas fully integrated with an adjoining 35-acre park, but generous recreational spaces within each of the 70 high-end residences. In fact, the oversized terraces typically occupy 40-50 percent of each unit's floor plate, reflecting the developers' recognition that outdoor amenities are





At The Residences at Rolling Hills Country Club, recreational space is integrated into the unique natural setting.

PHOTO COURTESY DAMIAN TSUTSUMIDA



Architect Robert Hidey created private recreational space on outdoor decks, in lieu of traditional backyards, at Jewel in Southern California.

essential even in high-density environments.

Retracting the sliding glass walls at Eighty Seven Park creates outdoor living rooms and dining rooms that appear to float above the Atlantic, fulfilling the quintessential South Florida luxury lifestyle. A two-story penthouse — it was placed on the market late last year for a record \$68 million — will feature 12,410 square feet of interior space coupled with more than 18,000 square feet of outdoor terraces, a dramatic commitment to indoor-outdoor living.

Playa Vista was a forgotten patch of wetlands outside Los Angeles when Howard Hughes discovered it in the 1940s — this is where the “Spruce Goose” aircraft was constructed — but the community’s visionary attitude reemerges as the epicenter of “Silicon Beach.” With Google, Facebook and dozens of startups drawing affluent young buyers, developers are struggling to keep up with demand in what has become one of L.A.’s hottest neighborhoods.

Southern California architect Robert

Hidey, whose eponymous firm is acclaimed for Mediterranean-style custom homes on the Pacific Coast, renewed his passion for modernism in Playa Vista. The architect, inspired early in his career by César Pelli and Richard Neutra, has created sleek multiple-level single-family homes in Playa Vista communities developed by Canadian homebuilder Brookfield Residential.

Because the Playa Vista lots are diminutive, with virtually no conventional space for outdoor recreation, Hidey and Brookfield created ingeniously private side yards and decks adjoining great rooms on the third floor, in lieu of traditional backyards. “I always try to connect the interior with the outdoors, and it’s actually easier to do that in a modern aesthetic than in traditional architecture constrained by the discipline and rigors of wall mass,” says Hidey.

Many developers were reluctant to implement the kind of innovations Hidey proposed, because placing decks over living areas raised construction defect liability concerns. But with advances in building products and practices, progressive builders like Brookfield embraced these outdoor spaces that have become popular with homebuyers. “Density creates a new set of challenges, which is the justification for bringing outdoor living to the roof, where privacy is protected and it’s out of the shadows,” explains Hidey. A 4,288-square-foot home at Jewel is currently on the market for \$4.058 million.

On a 228-acre site on the Palos Verdes Peninsula south of Los Angeles, Hidey applied a different approach at The Residences at Rolling Hills Country Club from builders Chadmar Group and Toll Brothers. As an overall theme, the architect expanded on the design ethos of

Cliff May, the father of the California ranch house whose vision helped shape the Golden State Dream. For these Peninsula residences, whose prices ascend to nearly \$5 million, recreational space is externalized, leveraging the impact of the natural setting through bridle, walking and biking trails.

Designer Larry Garnett, whose writings and media appearances inspire sustainable design, encourages builders to incorporate private outdoor spaces for all price points. Like Hidey, he is an advocate of creating side yards that are thoughtfully integrated into floorplans, potentially accommodating outdoor kitchens or lap pools. Fully coming to terms with the disappearance of the traditional backyard in high-cost areas, Garnett states, “If done appropriately, the side yard can replace the role of the year yard and be even more private.” And while Garnett appreciates the value of rooftop decks in California, the Texas-based designer suggests that particular innovation has geographic limitations, citing hot-and-humid Houston as a cautionary example.

In trendy Uptown Dallas, Bleu Ciel is an elegant high-rise residential tower, developed by Harwood International. What distinguishes the building, designed by Parisian architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte, are sweeping terraces that provide vast entertainment spaces for each condominium. Currently, a 5,800-square-foot

residence with an additional 2,000-square-foot terrace is priced at \$9.9 million. Another Harwood International project in the neighborhood is Azure, a sleek glass tower whose terraces feature gas fireplaces for those chillier Dallas evenings.

Downtown Miami’s Brickell City Centre, a billion-dollar mixed-use project of Swire Properties, offers twin residential towers, Reach and Rise, whose generous terraces ensure indoor-outdoor living in Florida’s most intensely developed neighborhood. Designed by the renowned hometown firm of Arquitectonica, the towers share nearly an acre of outdoor amenity decks and luxurious interiors spill out onto expansive outdoor living areas. In a two-floor penthouse at Reach, approximately 4,000 square feet of indoor living space is complemented by 3,400 square feet of private terraces. That is enough exterior living space to support an outdoor kitchen and plunge pool on the lower level and spa upstairs, all accompanied by stunning city and ocean views.

Maile Aguila, senior vice president of residential sales for Brickell City Centre, insists the penthouse collection at Reach and Rise is unrivaled in South Florida. “There’s nothing like this on the market, where you’re right in the middle of the action and can have it all right at your fingertips,” she says. **KW**

Condominium owners at San Francisco’s lavish 181 Fremont benefit from the building’s integration with an adjoining park.

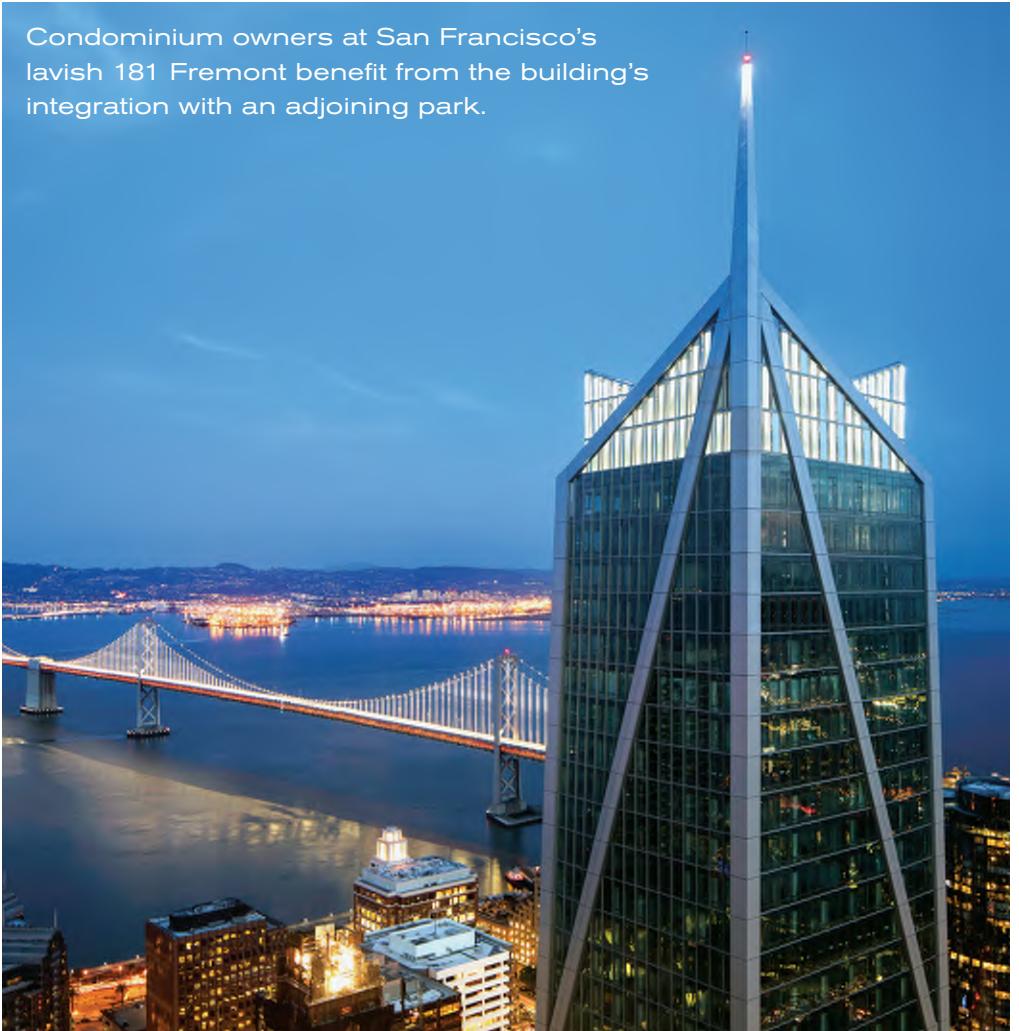


PHOTO COURTESY 181 FREMONT RESIDENCES