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Today's Sales Centers are More Luxurious Than Ever

BY JANA SOELDNER DANGER
Special to the Home Buying Guide

A real estate sales center has a basic purpose. It is supposed to show buyers what the development offers, and what the homes or apartments are like.

But, in today's competitive market, a successful sales center needs to do more than that. It must capture the attention of buyers the moment they come through the door.

After all, without an existing building, buyers have to use their imaginations and sign a deal on faith.

"People are buying air," said Arturo Belkind of Salini Design in Miami, a company that specializes in creating sales centers. "So you have to inspire lots of confidence and give them a real idea of what will be there. And you have to inspire people about the new life they'll have, because lifestyles are very important."

Belkind designs each sales center to have a decor and ambiance similar to what the building will have.

"Architects are doing incredible things with the buildings today, and the sales center has to reflect that," he said. "We use the same woods, colors and finishes that will be in the building."

A decade ago, a condominium sales center was likely to be housed in a simple, narrow trailer with an eight-foot ceiling. Potential buyers sat in a cramped office to discuss terms with the seller.

Today, sales centers often are still in trailers, but the look is much different. Many of the trailers are custom-built to create an affluent, luxurious ambiance.

"They might have nine- or 10-foot ceilings, curved walls, fiber optic lighting, floor-to-ceiling glass overlooking the ocean, and eight-foot doors," said Gordon Nimmo of Resun Leasing, Inc., a Palm

Beach Gardens-based company that manufactures custom trailers for sales centers. "The façade might be stucco, to give it depth and permanence."

The trailers take between eight and 14



Orange furniture accents the reception area of MURANO GRANDE's sales center.



AQUA's freestanding lifestyle exhibition reflects the simplistic and modern appointments that will be utilized throughout the community.



Expansive views of Biscayne Bay and the Miami skyline surround the scale model in the JADE sales and design center.

weeks to build. Since 16 feet is the maximum width an object can be if it is transported over the highways, several trailers may be put together to create a spacious sales center. Nimmo has built a number of them ranging from 5,000 to 6,000 square feet.

Inside, the trailers may be gussied up with features such as marble floors, natural

woods, granite walls and fountains.

The centerpiece is usually a three-dimensional model of the building.

"There'll also be huge light boxes with curved walls that show the views," Belkind said. "When you turn away from the building model, you immediately see the view you'll have from your

apartment. Then the buyer can sit down in a very comfortable area, and look at the different floor plans on a flat-screen TV."

The furniture in the sales center is often the same as what will be put eventually into the building. "Sometimes after they close the sales center, they use the furniture in the lobby of the building," Belkind said.

Despite the indoor opulence of the sales center, there often is outdoor space too. Belkind likes to build a wide deck to create additional South Florida ambiance. "You can invite the buyer out on the deck to sit in a comfortable chair, and have a glass of wine or cup of coffee," Belkind said. "Deals today are being signed outside, not in a trailer."

The sales center often includes a partial or complete model unit showing cabinetry and other accouterments. "Everything you're buying in the apartment will be in the model," Nimmo said.

Belkind, however, prefers to limit the model to the kitchen and master bath. When there is a complete model, some buyers judge the unit on the decor, and cannot use their imagination if it is not to their tastes. "There can be a negative effect if the buyer doesn't like the decorating," he said.

Some developers look for unusual ways to draw attention to their projects.

At BellaMare at Williams Island, a 30-story, 210-unit luxury tower in Aventura, WCI Realty decorated one the models to imitate an art gallery - complete with authentic Picasso sketches.

"All the art is original," said Steve Wolfson, vice president of sales at BellaMare. "This is a highly competitive market, and we needed to do something that really made us stand out. The gallery has accomplished that for us."

The sketches are part of the private collection of Steven Gurowitz, the interior designer who decorated the model.

"We get comments every day on the gallery," Wolfson said.

AQUA's location along the Intracoastal Waterway inspired the blue translucent acrylic walls surrounding the site plan table.



Reception area at JADE features a bird's eye maple wood desk with stainless steel channeling complemented by sandblasted crystal walls.

The MURANO GRANDE sales center captures the buyer from the moment of entry, giving visitors a view of the community's site plan table, kitchen vignette and views that will be offered from each residence.



"We'll often lift a piece of art off the wall so someone can see the signature. It's an opportunity for people to get up close to the artist, and it's a fun way to sell," Wolfson said.

At Sayan in Sunny Isles Beach, a 30-story oceanfront project by J. Milton & Associates, the sales center has the ambiance of an Indonesian spa rather than an office.

Tropical woods, bamboo, batik, bubbling fountains and scented candles create the look.

"The function is to make sales, but we think the whole buying experience should be nonstressful," said developer Gina Milton. "We want people to enjoy themselves."

The lobby in The Waverly, a 399-unit condominium project in South Beach, is decorated according to the concepts of feng shui, including a curved wall near the entrance to trap positive energy.



190 Northeast 199th Street, Suite 206 / North Miami Beach, Florida 33179
Phone: 305.651.8505 / Fax: 305.651.8574