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Optima Lumina

Text: Diane Kolak



In 2023, Optima, Inc., brought a new luxury rental community to Wilmette, Illinois—a lakefront suburb on Chicago's North Shore. Optima Verdana marked the Midwest debut of the firm's landscape-integrated approach to multifamily living with urban convenience. The six-story building places a typical residential module within a layered, glassy structure punctuated by terraces to create a strong indoor-outdoor rhythm on every level.

Optima's newest property, Optima Lumina, takes the concept in a more individualized direction. The new development offers ownership rather than rental, but the real difference is in its architecture. Optima Lumina adopts many of the same principles that made Optima Verdana so successful, but it also asks what happens when residents aren't just occupying the structure—they're participating in its definition through a flexible system of customization.

Optima Lumina challenges conventional ideas of fixed-plan condominium living, instead presenting a framework designed to be configured around individual ways of living. The 133-home development on the corner of Green Bay Road and Washington Avenue includes homes

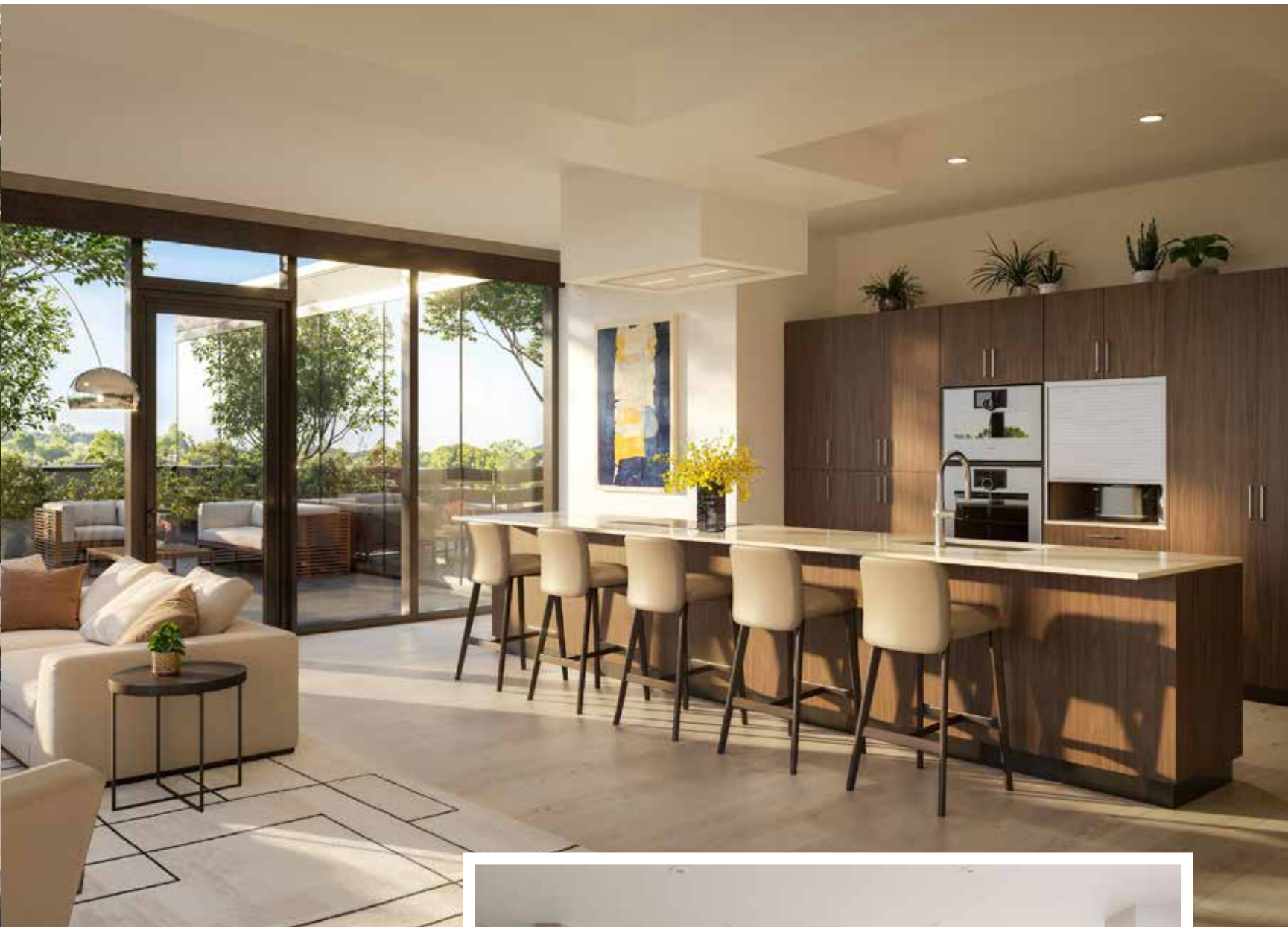
that can be combined horizontally or vertically, courtyard homes and a limited number of two-level residences.

"Optima Lumina offers buyers a level of personalization that is rarely available in condominium living," said David Hovey Jr., AIA, president of Optima. "The new development builds upon what residents love about Optima Verdana while introducing larger homes with luxury condominium finishes and extensive customization opportunities that let buyers create residences tailored to their lifestyle."

Beyond offering more choices, Optima Lumina challenges the idea that a condominium has to be a predetermined spatial product. Because Optima designs, develops and builds the project, customization is considered within the larger architectural system rather than added after the fact. That interior variety makes the building's architectural identity especially important. Because Optima Lumina's structure is what makes that flexibility possible, the firm turned to materiality as a defining element of Optima Lumina's architectural language.

While Optima Verdana's glassy presence is transparent and permeable, Optima Lumina moves toward depth, solidity and texture with 60 percent of its facade clad in architectural terracotta. Rather than relying on transparency alone to connect homes with the outdoors, Optima Lumina uses a more nuanced interplay of material, light, shadow, and landscape.

The shift was partly a response to community feedback favoring a distinct look for the second building. Optima reduced the glazing



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— David Hovey Jr., AIA, president of Optima Inc.

transparency across varying scales.” The material also enhances the building’s performance by reducing solar heat gain and withstanding Chicago’s weather extremes—all while requiring very little maintenance.

Terracotta also fits with Optima’s sustainability goals and its biophilic philosophy—inviting people and nature to connect through materials, views, and light. One technique Optima has brought into both Wilmette projects is its signature vertical landscaping system—a structure that supports

and introduced terracotta panels featuring extruded horizontal bars that add rhythmic depth and shadow to the facade. Hovey describes terracotta as a traditional building material which ties Optima Lumina’s design to the context of the Village.

“Terracotta offered both a contextual and performance-driven solution for the facade,” Hovey said. “It’s warm, earthy tones connect naturally to Wilmette’s Village Center and surrounding neighborhood, while its long history lends a sense of permanence.”

Hovey describes the terracotta sections as unifying elements that establish “a balance between opacity and

live plants, encouraging their growth up and over the edges of buildings. Greenery plays an important role in most of Optima’s projects, offering natural beauty as well as habitat for pollinators, evaporative cooling, air purification, sound dampening, and thermal insulation.

The material strategy carries into Optima Lumina’s interior spaces as well, with natural materials, a warm color palette, clean lines and expansive windows softening the boundaries between interior rooms and private terraces or courtyards. The interplay of material, light, and proportion gives the interiors a cohesive character.

Natural materials respond to changing light and weather, and they develop a patina over time. Those qualities also help the modern building to complement its architectural





context without copying it. Hovey likens it to using architecture to “tell a story that feels both timeless and relevant.”

That connection to the outdoors becomes more personal at the level of the individual residence. On the first floor, 12 courtyard homes offer open interiors with 12-foot ceilings and large windows opening directly onto private landscaped courtyards. For buyers who might lean more toward the space and privacy of a single-family home with a yard, the units offer something of a bridge between

a house and a condominium, with all its conveniences and amenities.

Five of the courtyard homes offer a two-level plan with direct access to private parking from the ground level. The additional floor can be configured in a variety of ways to suit changing needs. Extra bedroom suites, a home office, a media room, or exercise and wellness spaces fit easily into this plan and, “introduce an uncommon sense of scale and separation,” according to Hovey. The concept brings some of the privacy, autonomy, and

flexibility associated with single-family living into a condominium setting.

Because Optima considers each residence within the larger context of the building, customization can happen at the architectural level rather than stopping at finish selection. The option to combine units—unique in condominium design—opens significant possibilities. The company’s process is similar to that of designing a custom home, where buyers determine the size and relationship of the spaces for the scale and flow they need.

That distinction is important to Optima Lumina’s architectural concept, where some of the most consequential choices can happen at the spatial level. Finishes, cabinetry and fixtures are important, but they come after spatial customization—the aspect of home design that most affects how a person lives every day.

Within the cohesive terracotta-and-glass structure, the surprising variety of floor plan configurations creates a rich collection of homes reflecting different lives and styles.

That balance between individual expression and shared identity is at the heart of Optima Lumina’s approach, both within the building and in its relationship to the Village of Wilmette. It started with Optima Verdana and communities like Optima Center Wilmette, Optima 1618 Sheridan, and Optima Lake Courts, but the concept has evolved beyond simply providing convenient homes that bring in the outdoors. Optima Lumina offers residents different ways to inhabit it.