

portland home style
UpClose

by jennifer dirks
photography by caron hewitt



IN THE PEARL



MARSHALL-WELLS LOFTS, LAST OF ITS KIND IN THE PEARL.



CHICAGO ARCHITECT
SKYSCRAPER

THE 92-YEAR-OLD WAREHOUSE AT 1420 N.W. LOVEJOY STREET IS
THE SECOND LARGEST HISTORIC RESTORATION IN OREGON.



JUST THE FACTS

WHAT: Marshall-Wells Lofts, a warehouse under restoration at Northwest 14th Avenue between Lovejoy and Kearney streets in Portland's Pearl District.

UNITS: 164, ranging from 633 square feet to 2,800 square feet.

PRICE: \$134,000 to \$800,000. The deal includes a property tax break: a flat \$350 annual rate for the project's first 15 years.

NEARBY: Central City Streetcar (a car stops in front of the building every 12 minutes), coffee shops, boutique shopping, art galleries, brewpubs and museums.

INFO: www.marshall-wells.com

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hirty-six-year-old Robert Ball is like a kid in a candy store. The Portland developer and Police Bureau reserve captain is personally supervising three dozen hard-hat workers converting the Marshall-Wells Hardware Company warehouse into his latest pet project, the Marshall-Wells Lofts.

"Ever since he was a little boy," whispers his mother, tagging along on the tour, "he always wanted to wear a hard hat and direct a building."

More than 100 of the 164 light-flooded residential spaces have already been snapped up – months before the project's expected completion in August. "Everyone's just glomming on to this project, because it's a real loft," Ball says.

The Marshall-Wells property is one of the Pearl District's last remaining industrial warehouses suitable for residential conversion, and one of only a dozen or so authentic loft buildings in the city. It's also the most unique: inside, a 4,500-square-foot atrium plunges through the center of the building, open to the elements and lined with trees and benches, with a giant water fountain at its core. Interior windows look out into the atrium. Exterior windows – \$1.3 million worth of soundproof glass – look out onto views of Mount Hood, Mount St. Helens, Forest Park, two bridges, and the West Hills. The project is attracting a diverse group of homebuyers, says Ken Olenslager, associate broker for Marshall-Wells. "We've got a really wide range [of



Portland developer Robert Ball.

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ORIGINALLY DESIGNED BY DANIEL BURNHAM, THE WIDELY CONSIDERED THE FATHER OF THE MODERN

buyers] because there's a huge price range," he says, noting that the lofts sell from the mid \$100s up to \$800,000. Many of the smaller, lower-priced studios are being purchased as starter homes by young professionals who are now renting, he says. The larger lofts, meanwhile, are attracting older couples, many of whom are trading their multi-bedroom houses for the conveniences of inner-city living now that their children are grown. Olenslager says about 15 to 20 percent of buyers are from out of state. Some of these, he adds, are former Oregonians who have had successful careers elsewhere and are now moving back to Portland for a more relaxed lifestyle.

Originally designed by Daniel Burnham, the Chicago architect widely considered the father of the modern skyscraper, the 92-year-old warehouse at 1420 N.W. Lovejoy Street is the second largest historic restoration in Oregon. "I get my satisfaction," Ball says, "from taking an historic building – a treasure – and bringing it back." **P**

A COAT OF ANOTHER COLOR

After the restoration, the Marshall-Wells warehouse will keep its signature top-floor water tower. But the weathered, bright yellow "Bits & Pieces" sign on the concrete exterior and the graffiti-lined fire escape – both visible from the I-405 freeway overhead – will be swathed in a new coat of paint. "I want something that stands out, but not so far out that it turns people off," says Ball. Top colors under consideration are dark green, butterscotch or color-tinged ivory. "Of course the state will have its say," he says with a grin. "So it's not going to be lavender or anything."

