

Luxury rentals thriving as office life fades

The debut of an ultra high-end residential tower reflects an odd divide in downtown.

By ROGER VINCENT

By many measures, downtown Los Angeles' newest apartment tower is over the top with such gilded flourishes as stone tiles from Spain lining the elevator cabs and hand-troweled Italian plaster on interior walls. Hummingbirds have somehow found the fruit-laden trees decorating the outdoor lounge on the 41st floor.

For Stuart Morkun, the developer who oversaw construction of the recently completed Figueroa Eight skyscraper, it was the porte cochere, where residents leave their cars with valets, that really stood out. The travertine used to build it was mined from the same quarry outside Rome that supplied stone for the Colosseum, New York City's Lincoln Center and the Getty Museum.

"That's when I knew we were crazy," he said.

The decision by Mitsui Fudosan America, the Japanese real estate company that owns Figueroa Eight, to spend as much as \$350 million to build an ultra high-end residential tower in downtown L.A. might at first seem to be a risky gamble.

After all, L.A.'s homelessness crisis is on stark display on many downtown streets, and glitzy office towers looming nearby are dealing with low occupancy and falling values as law firms, financial service companies and other businesses that filled them before the pandemic have reduced space or departed altogether.

In fact, the decision to go big on Figueroa Eight, which opened last month, reflects an unusual disconnect playing out in the neighborhood: While downtown as a place to work still struggles to find its footing post-lock-down, downtown as a residential center is thriving. It boasts a large stock of housing in fancy new high-rises and converted historic buildings at rents that are well below those on the popular Westside.

The developers of Figueroa Eight declined to say how many of its 438 units they've rented out so far, but said leases are on track with projections and that the tower is attracting strong interest.

Downtown's urban feel drew attorney Leslie A. Ridings, an L.A. native who enjoyed living in New York while he attended college.

"Downtown Los Angeles is kind of the only game in town, right?" said Ridings, who lives in a high-rise at 8th and Olive streets. "It's the only 'city' in the city. It's not perfect, but it's the best we've got."

[See **Downtown**, A7]



ROBERT GAUTHIER Los Angeles Times

CAMERON GORDON on a lot he bought in Sun Valley in 2022. It's legal for him to work on the land but not to live on it full time. He plans to build a home on the property and park his ambulance on it in the meantime.

COLUMN ONE

Cameron Gordon's long fight for a place to live

He bought an ambulance to sleep in and a vacant lot, where a loophole allowed him to create a hillside oasis

By JACK FLEMMING

After a hard day's work, Cameron Gordon sometimes finds a bit of solace as he lounges on the gurney in his yard, surveying a patchwork of weeds, potted plants, garden beds and a hose that meanders across the dirt.

This is where his struggle to navigate the housing crisis has left him: living by day on an 18,000-square-foot lot in Sun Valley, pulling weeds, watering trees — and then leaving at night as he searches for a safe place to sleep.

Gordon's strange — and quintessentially L.A. — odyssey started when he found he couldn't afford an apartment and came to realize a home was whatever you can squeeze into.

A studio. An accessory dwelling unit. A camper. Gordon bought an ambulance.

Emblazoned with bright red paint, his boxy service vehicle has found a new purpose after being decommissioned. Storage shelves once lined with trauma kits now hold cooking utensils. The bench has been turned into a bed. So, if you see Gordon winding through the city, he's not transporting a victim. He's avoiding a parking ticket.

"It works for my lifestyle," he said. "It has thick walls [and] good insulation for the weather. I'd rather live for free in my ambulance than pay for a house I can't afford. That's what it actually means to be stuck."

[See **Gordon**, A5]

FOR REAL WITH AMY KAUFMAN

Who are the people shaping our culture? In her column, Amy Kaufman examines the lives of icons, underdogs and rising stars to find out — "For Real."

Tiffany Haddish isn't about to sleep on opportunity — or insults

"Come with me," Tiffany Haddish says, walking out her front door.

I've barely had the chance to say hello before she's heading down the sidewalk. I trail behind, fumbling around in my bag for a recording device as she explains that there's an open house she wants to check out before we sit in her Crenshaw home and discuss her new book of autobiographical essays — or anything else.

Haddish doesn't sleep on local real estate opportunities. She's deeply invested in South L.A., spiritually and financially. She already owns about a dozen properties in the area, many of which she rents out to organizations that house foster youths, and she plans to open a grocery store nearby that will give the community access to healthier food choices and offer programs on financial literacy.

She has two houses on this boulevard alone — one she sleeps in, one she works in — but neither needed the kind of work that is obviously required to make livable the for-sale property she walks into on this Sunday afternoon.

There are dark stains permeating the carpets, miss-

[See **Haddish**, A6]



KAYLA JAMES For The Times

PRESSURE MOUNTS ON UCLA POLICE CHIEF

Sources say there were serious security lapses leading up to Tuesday night's campus violence.

By TERESA WATANABE

The UCLA police chief is facing increasing scrutiny over what three sources told The Times was a string of serious security lapses before a mob attacked a pro-Palestinian student encampment last week.

But the chief, John Thomas, late Friday rejected those allegations and said he did "everything I could" to provide security and keep students safe during a week of strife that left UCLA reeling.

On the morning before Tuesday night's attack on the encampment, Thomas assured university leadership that he could mobilize law enforcement "in minutes," according to the sources. It took three hours to actually bring in enough officers to quell the violence.

Days earlier, campus leadership had directed Thomas to create a safety plan that would protect the UCLA community after the encampment was put up last week and began drawing

[See **UCLA**, A9]

Newsom quiet on campus upheaval

State lawmakers rush to craft legislation in response to protests over the war in Gaza.

By LAUREL ROSENHALL AND MACKENZIE MAYS

SACRAMENTO — In May 1969 a National Guard helicopter hung over the campus of UC Berkeley, spraying protesters with what The Times then described as "heavy clouds of tear gas."

It was the sixth consecutive day of campus demonstrations over plans to develop the land known as "People's Park." An ambitious governor who would go on to become president had called in 2,300 National Guard troops and hundreds of Highway Patrolmen. They brought shotguns, rifles and bayonets.

The problems, then-Gov. Ronald Reagan said in a feisty televised interview, all started because universities "let young people think they

[See **Newsom**, A9]

Are encampments on borrowed time?

Student protesters on campuses say they will remain until demands are met. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Hurricane, Hulk and a recording

Hope Hicks and other key witnesses took the stand in Trump's hush money trial. **NATION, A4**

Clippers facing big questions too

They enter important offseason after being eliminated by Dallas in first round. **SPORTS, D1**

An oral history of Weezer's debut

L.A. band revisits the Blue Album ahead of a 30th anniversary tour. **CALENDAR, E4**

Weather

Clearing. L.A. Basin: 71/52. **B10**
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