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- ▶ Photo Gallery
- ▶ Columnists
- ▶ Travel
- ▶ Lottery
- ▶ Obituaries

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- ▶ Personals
- ▶ Real Estate
- ▶ Rentals
- ▶ Vehicles
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A taste of Manhattan in East Bay suburbia

Trailside lofts are handsome, convenient

[Marsha Ginsburg, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

The stunning Iron Horse Trail is not exactly Central Park, and the new lofts along it are probably no match for the trendiest of such light-infused dwellings in New York City. But there is an unmistakable feel of Manhattan in the first townhouse-style lofts in the center of suburbia here.

Maybe it's the minimalist architecture, or the hip shades of red, black and gray of the 54-unit Iron Horse Lofts, immediately north of the Pleasant Hill BART station in unincorporated Walnut Creek.

But this haven in urban suburbia was created in response to commuters who needed to "live-work-ride," said the developer, Holliday Development. As anyone in suburbia can tell you, it's tough to do all three in the Bay Area.

Somehow, Iron Horse Lofts makes it work. You pay handsomely, but architect David Baker of San Francisco has managed to design 54 unimposing but appealing lofts, each with 11-foot ceilings.

Despite the selling price of between \$380,000 and \$509,000 - ranging from 1- bedroom, 2 bath to 3-bedroom, 3-bath with bonus room - all but three units have sold.

Built on a three-story platform, the lofts are designed to represent something a little edgier than the standard Contra Costa townhouse, which is generally modern, clean and as unimaginative as all get-out.

In this world, however, one finds a small, modern enclave built around two giant oak trees and a large, tastefully designed pool, conveniently shaped for urban professionals who would rather do laps in the pool than on the track.

Inside, the lofts are calming in their simplicity without trying too hard. Top-of-the-line features include gold Whirlpool appliances, black laminate countertops and light maple cabinets with stainless steel hardware that looks straight out of Restoration Hardware.

Windows abound, making the 1,120-square-foot, one-bedroom units (\$380,000) look huge. The soaring ceiling makes them look even larger.

On the ground level is the two-car tandem garage.

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Depending on the model - and the price - half of the garage space becomes an extra room, which can function as an office or den.

Upstairs is the entry to the loft, where a big living room and kitchen and full bath are brightened by the abundant windows. Up another flight of stairs are the master bedroom and bath, complete with double sink and walk-in closet.

While the interior looks classically modern, the exterior is reminiscent of the gritty look. Red front doors complement cinder block decks, which might seem unappealing but which look innovative and gorgeous.

Metal rope serves as a railing, while bumpy metal stairs offer a stark contrast to the giant redwood tree in the center of the complex. All the units also have private decks.

If it is true that buying property is about "location, location, location," Iron Horse Lofts is difficult to beat. It's literally behind the Pleasant Hill BART station - imagine not worrying about BART parking, let alone driving to the city.

It's also just a few hundred feet from the Iron Horse Trail, a former railroad right-of-way that has been converted to an East Bay gem, a hiking- biking trail that runs 25 miles through Contra Costa County.

Nearby is downtown Walnut Creek and its plethora of trendy chain stores and restaurants, as well as booming Pleasant Hill, which has thrived from a new center that offers everything from movies to Peet's coffee and the popular Left Bank restaurant.

Iron Horse Lofts models begin with one master bedroom and two baths and extend up to three bedrooms (including one with a separate entrance), a bonus room and three full bathrooms. The master bedroom in this model features a built-in entertainment center.

It's true that up to \$509,000 is a pretty hefty price for a suburban townhouse, but the sophistication and urban feel the lofts provide would cost much more in San Francisco - not to mention Manhattan.

IRON HORSE LOFTS

Developer: Holliday Development of Emeryville

Architect: David Baker FAIA and partners

City: Walnut Creek

Model: Version 1.0

Price: \$380,000

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Bedrooms: 1

Bathrooms: 2

Garage: 2 cars, tandem

Square footage: 1,120

Homeowner dues: \$165/month

Sales office hours: 12-5 p.m. every day except Thursday

Address: 4 Iron Horse Lane

Phone: (925) 945-6555

Web: www.ironhorselofts.com

E-mail Marsha Ginsburg at mginsburg@sfchronicle.com.

Page H - 60



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