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## **A FAMILY OF ARTISTS FINDS ITS SPACE**

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By PAULA VOELL - News Staff Reporter

Thomas Stender, whose furniture has won international acclaim, looks forward to working with other artists in shared exhibits.

It's only been a few weeks since the pioneer Artspace residents started moving into 1219 Main St., directly across from the Delta Sonic complex. But already they know this much: they are luxuriating in natural light and loving the s-p-a-c-e.

For the past couple of years, there's been a buzz among Buffalo artists about the lofts being planned for a building that's on the National Register of Historic places. Finally, tenants have begun to claim their space.

There's room to hang art and to hang out. There are "rooms" that are mostly wide open and undefined offering high ceilings, big walls, unencumbered vistas, views of the Campanile and Westminster Presbyterian Church on the Main Street side and, for those facing east, sunrises that bathe the rooms in pinks and purples. Plus, it's affordable.

Art photographer Lukia Costello, for example, pays \$474 for a 900-square-foot, one bedroom loft.

"In New York, this would be a million dollar condo," said another tenant Joanna Gillespie, who manages art collections. "I have a closet that would hold a twin-sized bed and a dresser, with room to walk around."

When everything is complete -- construction continues in common spaces -- this nearly 100-year-old building will house 36 lofts, along with gallery and retail space on the first floor. Also, 24 units are being constructed in six structures behind the building, also reserved for people in art-related fields, all of whom pay rent based on income and family size.

Thomas Stender, whose custom and one-of-a-kind furniture has won international acclaim, moved from an Elmwood Avenue apartment across the street from Cole's so he could be part of what he envisions as a built-in community of creativity, where artists engage in discussion and shared exhibits.

"I came for a walk-through and I liked what I saw," said Stender, who is so newly in place that he was having a box-flattening party. "It might be the only chance I have in life to move into a place where everything is new."

Designers and architects retained the old wooden floors, whitewashed brick walls and mechanical systems and, generally, left space open to the tenant's imaginations.

What they put in place are sleek white kitchen cabinets, contemporary bathroom fixtures, fluorescent lights purposely hung askew from wires in hallways, and spaces that beg to be decorated in eclectic fashion.

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Stender said he was "kind of semi-concerned," about safety and security before he moved in. "But I find the area is pretty much deserted at night, for good or ill," he said. "I observe normal city precautions, but really I haven't felt concerned."

Stender plans to work in an off-site studio, but will do computer designing at home, overlooking Main Street from his fifth floor perch.

Painter Emma Colby and Nichols School teacher Alison Wright share a two-bedroom loft that they are furnishing with donations from Wright's South Buffalo family.

"I think this loft is one of the most beautiful apartments I've ever been in," said Colby, who plans to paint there once she gets things in place. "When I look at the sunrise, it makes me feel like I'm in Sonoma Valley."

Colby said that when she returned to Buffalo after being in Ithaca for four years of college, she felt disconnected. "I had a lot of difficulty connecting with Buffalo artists," she said. "You'd find pockets in Allentown, but I never felt I was part of a network. I think this is the perfect remedy for the isolation I was feeling."

"We're incredibly happy to be here," said Colby. "It's rejuvenating to me to know it's happening in Buffalo. It solidifies my belief that Buffalo will resume its status as a major cultural player on the national scene."

It was a chance to live in Artspace, as well as a job with Starlight Studio and Art Gallery, that lured printmaker Joel Lewitzky to Buffalo from New York City, he said.

"I'm a skeptic and a huge pessimist, so I thought 'fat chance, in Buffalo, it's not going to happen,'" said Lewitzky. "But it's come to fruition, after a lot of waiting and wondering."

"What doesn't appeal is that I don't necessarily feel all that safe living in an area that hasn't had a lot of attention until now," he said. "There aren't riots in the streets, but there are drugs and crime. It's not the Elmwood Village or North Buffalo, where I'd feel more of a sense of security."

As the just-settling-in residents gave tours, it was clear how pleased they are with their new digs.

For sculptor and furniture maker Patricia Schraven, the loft provides a great way to display the 1886 cider press that she rescued at the curb and the metal lockers she found at Amvets, along with the exquisitely made one-of-a-kind art furniture that she designs and builds.

"There's so much space," said Schraven, who gets 1,100 square feet for \$624. "You have to find ways to break it up."

Schraven, who works for Dates-Weiser, a custom furniture company, creates her own furniture at another location. "I think the Artspace people were a little concerned about a fully operational wood shop with a table saw here," she said "so I kept my other studio."

For her part, Costello relishes the fact that she can keep home and work together.

"It's all blended because photography is such a big part of me," said Costello, who teaches adult education classes for the Buffalo public schools and is photo editor for [Passionateliving.com](http://Passionateliving.com).

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Montreal native Kelly Metcalfe, a University at Buffalo dance student, rents a three bedroom, two bathroom loft, large enough for her husband, Todd Baarwerk, and her sons, Noah, 3, Thomas, 6, and a kitten named Brubeck. Interrupted while she was painting walls, Metcalfe graciously invited visitors in to see the just completed bathroom, painted in Victory Purple, and the orangey-red master bedroom, where she built a platform bed that appears to be suspended from the ceiling with chains.

Metcalfe is pleased that she can raise a family in Artspace. "I think you'll never improve a neighborhood that needs support unless you put your life there," she said. "And the Artspace neighbors are phenomenal. We're all a little wacky, a little zany, so I think this will be a hub of energy."

Her sentiments are echoed by Gillespie, who said: "I think there will be a lot of synergy here, just as Tri-Main and Righteous Babe seem to do in their spaces."

Artspace's arrival here follows successes in 20 other cities, including Minneapolis, where Artspace began when artists were being priced out of their neighborhoods. The Buffalo building, which is 86,000-square-feet, was opened in 1911 as home to the Buffalo Electric Vehicle Company and closed in the 1990s as home to printing and storage companies.

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