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Andre Balazs, owner of the Standard Hotel downtown



MARK BOSTER/LOS ANGELES TIMES

**LAPS OF LUXURY:** Miguel Fletcher, a 25-year-old security consultant, takes a sunset swim at the Pegasus Apartments in downtown Los Angeles. The rooftop pool was a selling point when he decided to move in. "Sometimes, at night, you can see people working" in the buildings nearby, he said.

# Rooftop Pools Making a Splash in L.A.

Amid renovation and new construction downtown, developers are putting elaborate swimming holes atop their buildings.

By CARA MIA DiMASSA  
*Times Staff Writer*

Dive into the rooftop pool of the Pegasus Apartments — 13 stories above downtown Los Angeles — and the first few strokes you make will seem remarkably familiar.

Swoosh. The chlorine stings the eyes. Its smell permeates

Swoosh.

But soon you realize there's something different about the pulls you are making here. The squeak of bus brakes is audible as you bob above the water. An air-conditioning unit on a nearby building hums at a near-constant pitch.

Then there's the matter of the office building across the street. As you reach the pool's edge, you are staring into a floor-to-ceiling window of clutter — computer cords, paper and mess. Clearly, its owner wasn't prepared for someone peering into the window this high up.

In the midst of a building binge, downtown Los Angeles

is about to usher in the era of the rooftop pool. As existing buildings are renovated into residential units and new facilities are built downtown, rooftops long reserved for the unmentionables of city life — air-conditioning units and elevator controls — are being transformed into urban oases, courtesy of designers' imaginations and Southern California's sunny climate. Pools are the sun-drenched stars of those oases.

A host of new downtown buildings have rooftop swimming pools in their plans — including the 17th-story pool at 1100 Wilshire, where an office building is being converted into

condominiums, and the sunny, seventh-story pool at the Toy Factory Lofts, a former warehouse that has an impressive view of the downtown skyline.

At a meeting of downtown developers earlier this year, almost everyone in the room seemed to be suffering from pool envy, as builder after builder showed off plans for elaborate swimming holes on the tops of their buildings.

Many developers credit the success of downtown's Standard Hotel — whose rooftop pool and bar quickly became a hip gathering place after the hotel opened in 2002 — with spurring the push for pools up high.

The Standard's pool is still

so busy some days that guests are sent to the Pegasus, its neighbor to the south, to swim in the apartment complex's rooftop pool.

"The fact is, every hotel across the country is doing something on its roof if possible," said Andre Balazs, the hotel's owner. "The Standard downtown set a unique example, and everyone would like something like that."

Including a rooftop pool in designs for residential projects, said several developers, has become de rigueur — an amenity as common as a business center or concierge.

"We kind of are looking at [See Pools, Page B6]

*'... a really wonderful aspect of these rooftop pools or parks is that they foster community in an urban context.'*

**Paul Solomon**, a partner in the development firm Linear City



Photographs by MARK BOSTER *Los Angeles Times*

**LIQUID ASSET:** At the *Pacific Electric Lofts at 6th and Main*, the pool beckons from its perch eight stories up. To handle the weight of the water, the pool sits atop the building's concrete columns.

# OK, Everyone Up to the Pool!

[Pools, from Page B1]

[the rooftop pool] as an amenity that is a requirement to lease or sell the building, because all of our competitors are doing that," said Mike VanEtten, vice president of construction for Forest City Residential West.

Pacific Electric Lofts, Santee Court and the Medici feature rooftop pools. So will the Brockman and the Eastern Columbia, under construction.

Rooftop pools are not cheap. Adding thousands of pounds of water to the weight that a building's columns must support means that some structural engineers have had to get creative about how to make rooftop pools work.

Often, the pools are shallow

— 3 or 4 feet deep at most. And many of them are perched atop platforms, allowing their weight to be better distributed across the span of the buildings — and preventing costly leaking if the pools ever overflow. The Pegasus added a rooftop succulent garden at one end of its roof, to prevent huge numbers of people from disturbing the balance of the roof.

But many builders say the expenditures are necessary — both to compete with other projects downtown and to create a spot where residents can gather.

Paul Solomon — a partner in Linear City, which developed the Toy Factory Lofts in the downtown arts district and is in the process of renovating the Biscuit Co. building, on the site of the former Nabisco bakery — said rooftop spaces offer a place where residents can breathe and share a common space. Both of the company's projects feature rooftop pools and gardens.

"Whether intended or not, a really wonderful aspect of these rooftop pools or parks is that they foster community in an urban context," Solomon said.

Kate Bartolo, senior vice president of development for Kor Group, echoed that sentiment. She promised that when the Eastern Columbia opens next year, the turquoise tile building's rooftop pool will be a place where residents will "get to know each other. We wanted a gathering place," she said. "It fosters that feeling of a neighborhood."

At the Pacific Electric Lofts at 6th and Main streets recently, the rooftop garden hadn't been finished, but the pool beckoned from its perch eight stories up.

Once upon a time, a rooftop garden designed by Henry Hun-

tington provided a verdant playground for members of the exclusive Jonathan Club, whose headquarters were in the building's upper floors.

Now, Australian willow trees in oversize white pots line a pathway sprinkled with smooth pieces of glass. Brown chaise lounges dot the deck around a 15-by-30-foot pool that can accommodate up to 22 people.

To handle the weight of the water, the pool sits atop the building's structural concrete columns. Its decking is supported by a steel frame and lightweight concrete.

The building, which is just opening to residents, has retail space downstairs for cafes and clubs.

Steven Reinstein, senior vice president for ICO Development, which owns Pacific Electric, said the firm hoped those tenants would use the pool deck for special events and parties.

The rooftop at the Pegasus, said resident Miguel Fletcher, was a "selling point" for the building when he decided to move downtown two years ago. Now, the 25-year-old security consultant swims there a few times a week, usually at sunset.

"Sometimes, at night, you can see people working" in the buildings nearby, he said.

Fletcher said the rooftop pool was one more way in which downtown has transformed itself into something hipper and more vibrant than it has been for a long time.

"You can get that element of being at the beach in the middle of the city," Fletcher said. "You can throw off the suit and jump into the pool in swimming trunks — all in the middle of the business district."