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San Francisco Chronicle

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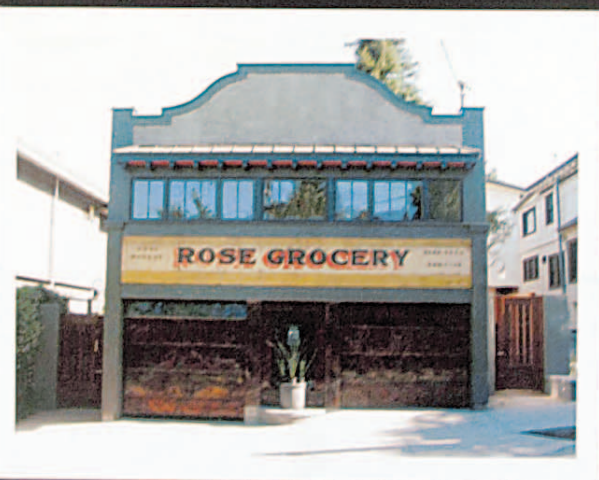
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A ROSE BLOOMS IN BERKELEY

Historic storefront given new life as entryway to a pair of chic condos

By Dana Perrigan

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Let's face it: No matter how beloved, some family members are difficult to deal with. They can be stubborn, cranky, seemingly impervious to reason and — unlike fine wine — they don't always age well.

For Berkeley resident Robert Kehlman, that description serves as well for the old Rose Grocery store he has lived next to for the past 34 years.

"It's been a part of the family," says Kehlman, who made a list linking his son Ephraim's growth to the store's progressive deterioration.

When Ephraim entered preschool, the owners moved out; in kindergarten, the front window was broken; the first fire occurred when he left grade school; in junior high, there was a rat infestation; part of the back roof fell in when he flunked archery at Berkeley High; a second fire marked graduation; the entire back roof gave way as he entered college and, when his Internet startup company failed, the store's walls, in apparent

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Photos by LEA SUZUKI / The Chronicle

Life of the Rose — The photos at left are framed and hang in the new condos. They show the Rose Grocery as it looked shortly after it was built in 1908, at the peak of its neglect a little more than a year ago, and as it looks today. Inset, developer and architect David Trachtenberg.

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BLOOM OF THE ROSE

► ROSE GROCERY

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sympathy, collapsed.

Ephraim is now 35 and the proud father a recently born son. And the old store — built by German immigrant George Hunrick in 1908, abandoned in 1966 and designated a Structure of Merit by the city in 1988 — has been re-born. That rebirth, in the form of a pair of upscale condominiums, has alternately been hailed as a new way of building, an example of the architectural maturation of American culture and a model of how to work expeditiously with the city's regulatory commissions.

"I think a large part of the market is turned off by new houses in the Bay Area," says David Trachtenberg, the Berkeley architect who bought the 5,000-square-foot lot a year ago. "People out there are looking for better, but all they're getting is bigger. In this age of scarce land, I think this represents a new way of building."

Trachtenberg, whose commissions include the Berkeley Bowl on Shattuck Avenue and Cody's Books on Telegraph Avenue, rejected the popular notion of building the largest possible structure with as many units as possible, as cheaply as possible, to maximize profit. Instead, he created a space that has an organic feel to it — two dwellings, with an interior courtyard of gravel and flagstone and gardens designed by his brother Robert Trachtenberg of Garden Architecture. The project was built by Kaufman Construction.

With 10-foot ceilings, sustainable Brazilian cherrywood floors and windows that allow light from at least two directions, the condos have an airiness and sense of spaciousness beyond their actual proportions. Combined with stone counters, Viking ranges and other quality interior appointments, the two condos appear refined and elegant.

Red Oak Realty lists the 2,000-square-foot condo built at the rear of the lot, whose two floors contain two bedrooms, two full baths and one partial bath, at \$985,000. The 1,510-square-foot condo at 2209 Rose has the same number of bedrooms and baths and includes a separate 500-square-foot studio built over the garage. It goes for \$875,000.

While the restrictions imposed on development of a Structure of Merit may have discouraged others, Trachtenberg considered it a



Photos by LEA SUZUKI / The Chronicle

The Rose Street condos are finished nicely with Brazilian cherrywood floors and stone counter work, above. Left, private outdoor space is an urban bonus.

challenge and an opportunity. He and his partner, Dr. Laurie White, sat down at a meeting with the mayor, council members, zoning and planning officials, and neighborhood residents.

"What allowed us to move very quickly was the sort of coming together of various planets," says Mark Rhodes, head of Berkeley's Planning Commission. "The project application was consistent with the needs and desires of the neighbors and the city. We don't get that very often — no city does. So when you get one, you try to

move quickly."

"There's a perception out there that Berkeley's hard to work in," says Trachtenberg. "I don't find that the case. It was actually quite easy. The process was fast. We sat in a room for a couple of hours and came up with a solution."

"He (Trachtenberg) thought outside the box," says Kehlman, who led the neighborhood contingent. "The neighborhood was solidly behind this."

As former head of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, Kehlman had argued against designating the old store a Structure of Merit.

"That designation put a lot of limitation and restrictions on the site," he says. "I thought it was a bad idea. As it turns out, it was a good idea. It's one of the most interesting features of the neighborhood."

The store's original owner, Hunrick, had come to California to study banking with the founder of the Bank of America, A.P. Giannini. In 1906, he moved to Berkeley and ran a grocery store on Shattuck. Two years later, he moved his business to the Rose Street location to serve the growing population in the north Berkeley hills.

There were a number of specialty shops in the area, known as the Berryman Station shopping district. It was connected to other parts of the city by a network of streetcar and train lines. Because homes lacked refrigeration, residents would place orders for groceries in the morning. In the afternoon, the groceries were delivered.

The two condos at 2211 and 2209 Rose St. in Berkeley are separated by a courtyard. The 2,000-square-foot condo built at the rear of the lot is listed at \$985,000. The 1,510-square-foot condo at 2209 Rose is listed at \$875,000.

The distinctive architectural feature of Hunrick's store was its Mission Revival false-front parapet, which the city wanted to retain. Trachtenberg incorporated the store's facade in his design. The Rose Grocery sign remains. Below it, copper panels cover garage doors, flanked by carved wooden pilasters, in place of the windows in which Hunrick once displayed his wares. A historical plaque marks the site of the store's entrance.

Having to keep the facade turned out to be a boon for Trachtenberg. Because he did not have to abide by the city's requirement for a setback on new residential lot development, more space could be utilized.

It also meant that he could diverge from the traditional pattern of American home design — a dwelling fronted by a large yard — and create something that he believes works better: The idea of a gated front wall that leads into a private courtyard, where the buildings are connected to gardens. The architect believes this — examples of which can be found in many Italian dwellings — helps residents make a deeper emotional connection to their homes.

Trachtenberg considers this change in architectural philosophy as a big shift in American home design.

"People are looking for simple, solid, livable space that doesn't require a lot of resources," he says. "Where they can walk to places. Where they can live without a car. I think that there's a cutting-edge group of people out there for whom the great luxury is simplicity. It's a maturation of our culture."

Kehlman, who once viewed the old grocery store as a troublesome relative, says he and the neighbors are more than pleased with the transformation.

"In point of fact," he says, "it was ugly. It was an eyesore. But it's not ugly anymore. Now, when we look out of our kitchen window we see a nice fence, lots of light and a beautiful property — maybe it was worth the wait."

The two condominiums at 2211 and 2209 Rose St. in Berkeley will be open today from 2 to 5 p.m.

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