

The Loop Has 500 New Luxury Apartments at OneEleven Wacker

You'd never know this glitzy 60-story building was once Waterview Tower—an abandoned project and a symbol of a crashed economy.

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One of the most prominent symbols of the stark turns in Chicago's economy over last decade has to be the failure of [Waterview Tower](#)—and its resurrection as [OneEleven Wacker](#).

Back in 2008, a partially built 89-story hotel and condo development at Clark Street and Upper Wacker Drive was abandoned, leaving a 26-story blot on the riverfront's iconic canyon. With its splayed open parking garage and lower hotel levels, people came to know the skeletal husk as a monumental miscalculation, and a symbol of a crashed economy.

Some kind of development was bound to return to this site, central as it is to business and entertainment, but the developer who took hold in July 2011—[Related Midwest](#)—had to do a year-long engineering study just to confirm the existing structure could be salvaged.

With the engineering questions cleared, Related began an adaptation of the hotel structure for residential use. "The challenges that this set up were in sizing and spacing of floor plans and unit layout," says Related Midwest's senior vice president of architecture



OneEleven Wacker takes its place on the river between Beaux Arts and PoMo. Photo: Ian Spula

and design Ann Thompson. [Gary Handel](#) and [Kara Mann](#) were selected for architectural and interior design, respectively, and worked closely to include select materials throughout the building. The same polished bronze on the canopy shows up on lobby and elevator doors, and durable porcelain tile mimics wood in common areas.

It was important to design a retrofit for the site that respected the historic ‘Wacker wall’ with height and datum lines in context, but also distinguish the new building as the first rental tower on the central stretch of Wacker. Thus, a stone façade was nixed in favor of glassy minimalism with nods to classic precursors. Filigree flanks the main entry and ripples through the tower, which was a device used by Louis Sullivan to soften the hard city for residents returning to their private realm. [Expand map](#)

On the engineering side, says senior vice president of construction Don Biernacki, “building two buildings at a time presented some challenges.” All of the plumbing in the lower 26 floors was laid out for hotel use, not residences. “When re-laying plumbing we had to scan every slab for rebar.” The curtain wall had to be phased in top-down—one of several unusual engineering steps that might have made the whole project cost prohibitive if not offset by the half-tower already in existence. “We never would’ve built 60 stories of residential at this location otherwise,” says Curt Bailey, president of Related Midwest. But build they did, and quickly, with construction commencing in January 2013.

At 60 stories and 500 units, OneEleven is the largest single rental building in the Loop. (River North and Lakeshore East have apartment towers of comparable size, and there’s the four-pack Presidential Towers, but they’re in defined residential districts.) Comprised of studios, one-, and two-bedroom units, the average size is 850 square feet—by no means huge, but a step up from Related’s [500 Lake Shore Drive](#). Bailey credits the existing structure’s layouts with skewing unit size upward. “I may intentionally build bigger in the future, because we’re seeing huge demand for our largest units in other buildings.” In the luxury apartment world, it’s either big spreads or vast amenities and most developers have gone for the latter. OneEleven is at the top of the market, but the trade-off is the same.

One happy inheritance for Related was that the natural architectural split that had to ex-

ist between old and new pieces of the tower provided a logical place for an amenity level. Hence, a double height full-floor space spanning floors 27 and 28 gives tremendous Loop and river views for residents lounging, swimming, gaming, and conferencing. Mann brought rich detailing to these spaces, with the help of artists and a big budget. Absurdist lighting design meets irreverent wallpaper and abstract commissioned art by [Diana Thater](#), [Thrush Holmes](#), and [Tauba Auerbach](#).

“We wanted to differentiate ourselves with design and architecture,” says Bailey. “Careful sourcing of art is a part of that...The harder-edged city setting influenced our overall design scheme, too.”

The amenity deck, rolling off a razor sharp lap pool, is another space to seduce prospective tenants. It’s a double-decker sun-drenched maze with grill station dining areas, a cabana, a fire pit, an Astroturf lawn, and a chaise lounge section.

“You need to get lucky when you do a deal,” says Bailey. “One of the strokes of luck with this asset is how River North has continued to grow. And the city is investing \$140 million right in front of us [in the Riverwalk].”

Price Points: The most affordable class of rentals, studios priced between \$1,600 and \$1800, has already been snatched up. Available studio rents begin at \$1,895; one-bedrooms at \$2,595; two-bedroom, two-bath units at \$3,995; and three-bedroom, three-bath units at \$7,595.

Garage parking and utilities, including high-speed internet and cable, are charged separately, and be prepared for a mix of one-time move-in and pet fees. There are 14 units in every podium floor and an average of 12 in newer floors, with the 58th floor (the top residential level) divvied up into four penthouses. The podium floors have ceiling heights between nine and 10 feet where the upper levels stick with an even nine.

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