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COVER STORY

THE DAWN OF NEW LUXURY

A wave of opulent condo developments is underway in the Bayou City. And developers say it's been a long time coming.

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COVER STORY

A LUXE LIFE IN THE BAYOU CITY

Flood of new high-end condo projects signals a shift in the Houston market.

BY JEFF JEFFREY | jjeffrey@bizjournals.com

Imagine you've just gotten home after a long day at the office. ¶ You toss your keys to the valet waiting in the lobby and make your way upstairs. Let him park the car. ¶ Now, you have a choice. You could head up to your customized condo unit, with all of its luxurious finishes, and kick back while enjoying spectacular views of Houston in all of its beauty. ¶ Or you could head up to the skydeck, grab a glass of wine and watch the sun set over Buffalo Bayou. Or you could take a dip in a resort-style pool overlooking the downtown skyline.

Or you could pop down to the onsite restaurant and enjoy a meal prepared by one of the finest chefs in the country. Or why not have the concierge bring that meal right to your door, so he can grab your dry cleaning on the way out?

For decades, that kind of ultra-luxury living simply wasn't possible in Houston. But a wave of new condo developments boasting platinum-plated branding have gotten underway in the Bayou City.

Think Auberge Collection, Ritz-Carlton, St. Regis.

And, as New York-based Douglas Elliman recently reported, branded residences are among the fastest selling properties in Texas right now. But why now, after all these years?

The developers say it's been a long time coming. Ask the people behind the projects, and they will say the demand for luxe living in Houston was always there, only the supply did not exist.

Add in the fact that coastal markets are condo-saturated, which has left investors looking for a place to park their money. They see a wealthy city with no zoning, a growing population and a resilient economy, and these kinds of projects become "an investment no-brainer," one developer said.

"I have always said that if Houston didn't have a Mercedes dealership, everyone would be driving Fords and Chevys until they could import a Mercedes from another state," said Sunny Bathija, the developer behind The St. Regis Residences Houston at 102 Asbury St. "But if you build a Mercedes dealership in Houston, there will be people there ready to buy."



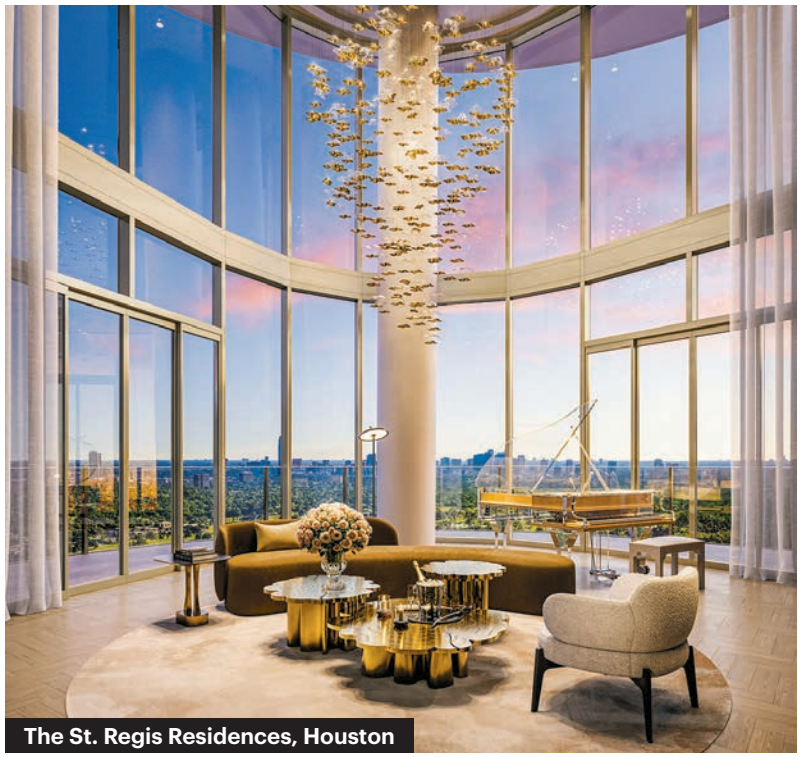
The Allen


Ritz-Carlton Residences, The Woodlands


Ritz-Carlton Residences, The Wood




lands


The St. Regis Residences, Houston


The RO

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Before the flood

Houston has always had condos, but developers who spoke with the Houston Business Journal said the market has been underserved for years, and the product that was available has started to show its age.

The ultra-luxury dam really broke in 2024, when Houston-based DC Partners unveiled The Residences at The Allen along Allen Parkway.

The $290 million, 35-foot tower features 99 condo units sitting atop Houston's first Thompson Hotel, which has 172 guest rooms.

The sell with The Allen was that residents have all the benefits of having a top-tier hotel with room service, onsite concierge and plenty of additional amenities while living in exclusive condo tower offering stunning views in every direction.

The concept seems to have worked. At last check, over 90% of The Allen's units had sold, including a penthouse listed at $9 million.

In greater Houston, there currently are four super-lavish projects in development, all of which aim to claim the title of the area's finest. Additionally, Benjamin Watson, a vice president at Douglas Elliman, said a fifth branded condo tower might be coming soon.

"It's important to note that Houston is a global city; it is a global hub for energy, oil and gas; the medical center is world-renowned; it's a growing tech hub, as well as a legal center – some of the best law firms are in Houston," Watson said. "Houston has one of the largest pools of international buyers, and this helps with condominium absorption on the branded residential, and the super primes that are coming to market."

The Birdsall, Auberge Collection

Of the uber-posh projects that are now underway in Houston proper, Transwestern's The Birdsall, Auberge Collection, at 3120 Buffalo Speedway is the furthest along. The 34-story tower is scheduled to be completed by late 2027 and will offer 44 private condos above a 105-room boutique, luxury hotel – the only Auberge Collection hotel in the city.

The Birdsall's resident-only amenities will include a covered, open-air swimming pool, an outdoor entertainment deck, a summer kitchen, a game room and areas dedicated to wellness and fitness.

Residents also will have access to a private members' club; a destination Auberge restaurant; event spaces; a resort-style wellbeing destination; pool and fitness facilities; and dining and social spaces, including a European-style café and private garden.

Like The Allen, residents will have access to the hotel's amenities and benefits. Auberge Collection hotels are known for their premium, white-glove service and extravagant resort-style experience, with a touch of local flair.

Sean Suffel, who leads Transwestern's development efforts in Houston, said The Birdsall project wouldn't have happened if not for the Auberge Collection connection.

"Auberge is a unique luxury brand, so getting them on board was very intentional, both by us but also Auberge," Suffel said. "Like everything we are doing at The RO, we want it to be an extension of River Oaks. Auberge's hotels are often, not always, in places where they wouldn't make sense anywhere else because they draw inspiration so heavily from the local community. That was attractive to us because of everything we are doing at The RO and how it ties into River Oaks."

While Suffel declined to comment on specific sales numbers, he said they have exceeded Transwestern's expectations, both in sales velocity and pricing.

The St. Regis Residences, Houston

Condo developers are split on the overall benefits of adding a hotel component. Yes, residents have all the upsides of luxury hospitality service. But some developers dislike the idea of nightly guests having access to the same amenities as residents.

Bathija, who serves as CEO of Satya Inc., has been vocal in his opposition to adding hotel rooms to his St. Regis-branded project. Having lived in a combination tower before, Bathija said dealing with rowdy or boorish hotel guests can create frustrations for residents.

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"Why should they have access to the same amenities I paid $3 million for, when they paid only $500 a night?" Bathija has said previously.

When the $255 million St. Regis Residences Houston are completed in 2029, residents can expect a slew of amenities – and no hotel guests.

The 38-story, 90-unit condo tower, which broke ground in May, will have over 40,000 square feet of amenities, including a resort-style lap pool, hot and cold plunge pools, private cabanas, men's and women's steam rooms, saunas, locker rooms, a full spa, a fitness studio, yoga and movement studios, a meditation garden and a yoga lawn, outdoor grills, a catering kitchen and a bar.

The sky terrace on the 26th floor will have a private dining room, a cognac bar, coworking spaces and the Astor board room, named for the family that founded the St. Regis. And residents will be treated to the St. Regis' renowned concierge service, which includes valet service and doorstep package deliveries.

Like Suffel, Bathija said he's been thrilled with the pace of sales.

Fifty percent of the St. Regis' units already have sold, and all seven penthouse units are spoken for, Bathija said. At the end of 2025, the tower scored $80 million in sales in less than 30 days, Bathija said. Gross sales totaled $180 million at that point.

One unit listed for $17.8 million recently sold at the St. Regis, according to a listing by Douglas Elliman, which is handling sales for the project.

The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Houston

Elsewhere, Houston-based developer Deiso Moss is ramping up its effort to build the 45-story Ritz-Carlton Residences Houston at 2120 Post Oak Blvd. in Uptown.

The company has said the combination hotel-condo tower will set a new standard for luxury living.

The project will include a 156-key Ritz-Carlton hotel alongside 112 branded residences. The project is scheduled to be completed in late 2029.

The hotel portion will blend high-end restaurants with other amenities that can be enjoyed by both hotel guests and residents.

Residents can expect nearly 27,000 square feet of dedicated, owner-only amenities, including a separate pool deck, a heated lap pool, outdoor cooking areas, pet facilities, a golf simulator room, a residents-only restaurant and bar, and a private fitness center. Those amenities will be on their own private floors, and there will be a private motor court, lobby and elevators to ensure a completely independent arrival and living experience.

The Ritz-Carlton project is already setting sales records. The top penthouse unit recently sold for a staggering $30 million, which is believed to be the highest-priced condo ever sold in Texas, based on publicly available records.

As of May, the Ritz-Carlton Residences Houston had $203 million in condo sales.

"Our biggest differentiator is the hotel aspect and our location," Deiso Moss co-founder Taylor Moss said. "We're finding that buyers really gravitate to Post Oak Boulevard because it's a statement address. The idea of having a Ritz-Carlton hotel beneath them, with all of the amenities while still having the condo portion completely bifurcated and separate is really appealing to discerning buyers."

The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Houston



THE BOUNDARY

The 44-story Ritz-Carlton Houston tower is expected to be over 600 feet tall and will combine 154 hotel guest rooms with 114 private residences.

Ritz-Carlton Residences, The Woodlands

The flurry of local ultra-luxury condo developments is not specific to Houston.

Howard Hughes Holdings Inc. is nearing completion on The Ritz-Carlton Residences at 2399 Lake Woodlands Drive.

That development, which topped out last September, offers nearly 40 different floor plans, including penthouse condos, ranging from 1,850 to more than 5,000 square feet. The 111 two- and three-bedroom units will be distributed among two 15-story towers connected by a 15,000-square-foot amenity area.

Indoor amenities will include an owner's lounge and bar area with concierge service, private dining rooms, a wine cellar, a library that opens onto a private garden, a sport simulator room and a fitness center overlooking Lake Woodlands with cold plunge, dry sauna and treatment rooms.

Outside, there will be a pool, a cutting garden, dining bungalows with outdoor kitchens, an owner's boathouse, and a private sports court.

There's also approximately 1,200 feet of lakefront shoreline for owners' private use.

Howard Hughes CEO David O'Reilly said the Ritz-Carlton in The Woodlands pre-sold 69% of its units before breaking ground. The remaining units are not yet available for sale.

"Some people thought I was crazy when we decided to pull the remaining units (from sale)," O'Reilly said. "But we demonstrated the demand was there before the building was even built. Imagine what the demand is going to be when they can see, touch and walk around a unit."

That project, which has been in presales since March 2024, will offer 111 two- and three-bedroom units spread across two 15-story towers, which will be connected by a 15,000-square-foot amenity area with a resort-style pool deck offering a number of high-level benefits to residents.

Standing out

With so many new ultra-luxury condo projects underway, developers are working to differentiate their project from the competition.

The Birdsall, Auberge Collection, for example, will not only give residents and guests access to the level of treatment Auberge is known for, but they will also be in the midst of a retail and restaurant hotspot.

"Not only are we in a great location – we wouldn't have built it anywhere else – residents will have access to all of the amenities this 17-acre district will have to offer," Suffel said. "That's pretty different from what exists in Houston today."

For the St. Regis, the difference is the amount of amenities. Bathija has said that the only amenity the project didn't include was a bowling alley because it created engineering problems. The St. Regis also will have full-building generators, meaning that if a storm hits, residents might not even notice.

The Ritz-Carlton in Uptown is highlighting the brand's world-famous level of service and that by being in Uptown, residents will have easy access to dozens of restaurants and retail establishments, Moss said. Additionally, because the tower is expected to be 600 feet tall, the views will be unlike those at any other condo.

The Ritz-Carlton Residences The Woodlands is making the case that, well, it's the Ritz-Carlton in The Woodlands: unsurpassed luxury in the heart of one of the nation's most desirable master-planned communities. That kind of sells itself, O'Reilly noted.

Friendly competition

All of the developers the HBJ spoke with said they think the market can more than handle the new units set to come online in the next few years, even at ultra-luxury prices.

"As a Houstonian, I am happy that these projects are happening," Bathija said. "I want to see that development. It's going to create a $500 million tax base … That's good for all of us."

Moss agreed that the pace of development is good for the city.

"When you go to the capital markets in New York and mention Texas, the first cities they think about are Austin and Dallas," Moss said. "As a Houstonian, it's frustrating. It's great to have all of these projects happening at once because it gets the capital markets more intimately familiar with Houston, and it helps them to give the local market a little more notice."

Indeed, Houston stands out among Texas cities, when it comes to the ultra-luxury end of the market.

Condos prices at $2 million and higher accounted for 53% of contracts signed in Houston during the second quarter of 2026, according to Douglas Elliman's most recent Texas Market Reports. That's compared to 18% and 31% in Austin and Dallas, respectively.



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