

Three homeowners at all stages of life happily share their stories about maintenance-free living on EasyStreetSM.

The Easy Life

By Tess Langfus • Photography By Justin Grierson



Sophia Kim in her home at 9th St. Lofts in downtown St. Paul.

When people move into maintenance-free townhomes, condominiums, or lofts, a primary reason is to save time. Few people like to labor during their leisure hours and unfortunately, for most single-family homeowners, the time spent away from the office is typically spent caring for their lawn or maintaining their house. These three homeowners decided that their free time was better spent enjoying the outdoors, spending time with family and friends, and traveling—**in essence, doing exactly what they want to do.**

Keep the Garden, Ditch the Yard

Having more time to relax, garden, or spend in their Arizona condominium are a few of the reasons why Jill Akre and her housemate Mary Steitz decided to move into the townhomes at The Village at Mendota Heights in December. "It fits our lifestyle perfectly," Akre says. Akre, in her late fifties, and Steitz, in her early sixties, previously owned a large single-family home in St. Paul's Highland Village and spent most of their time shoveling, landscaping, and maintaining their home and large lot. "We were always working on the house, always getting teased about it," Akre says. "But actually, it got to a point where it was just too much." Instead, Akre, a vice president in risk management at Wells Fargo Retirement Plan Services in Roseville, and Steitz, a doctor in psychology, decided they would rather use their time to take vacations, golf, bike, walk, or just relax.

Steitz is a master gardener, so when the two women searched for a new home, two of their criteria were maintenance-free living and private-landscaping capabilities. The Village at Mendota Heights offered both. Each unit at The Village has its own privately fenced backyard which homeowners can landscape to their own taste. Steitz customized their private patio area and will help landscape the development's common area. Downsizing from a large garden to one that is more manageable was a better fit for their busy lifestyle. "Rather than be overwhelmed by [gardening] and so committed, you can do it more as a pleasure, which is what it was intended to be, really," says Akre. "Maintenance-free living freed up more time instead of using vacations to do all the work that you can't get done."



Jill Akre and Mary Steitz in their home at The Village at Mendota Heights.

More Time with the Kids

For Scott Nelson, his move to the Willoughby Townhomes in Minnetonka last December afforded him more time to focus on his two small children, five-year-old Grant and two-year-old Audrey, who live with him part-time. Forty-two-year-old Nelson, the vice president of an organizational leadership de-



Scott Nelson in his kitchen at Willoughby Townhomes in Minnetonka.

velopment consulting firm in Golden Valley, spends about 40 percent of his business time traveling. He had previously lived in a large home where he spent about 15 percent of his free time doing yard work and maintaining the property. Then, after divorcing, he moved into an apartment for more than a year. "Now, I'm at a point in my life where I want to really focus on my kids, my work, and anything else that has to do with enjoying life, not necessarily home maintenance," Nelson says. Not that he minded the yard work or building upkeep, Nelson says, but he'd rather pay an association to do it. "From my perspective, it's all a matter of choice, and I wanted to make a choice to do other things," Nelson says.

So instead of mowing the lawn or replacing the shingles, Nelson plays catch with his son or takes the kids to the nearby park. His time is also freed up to do other things he enjoys, like visiting with his family and friends, golfing, working out at the gym, or playing basketball and racquetball. When he's not traveling, Nelson comes home to a yard that is well-maintained and a townhouse that has all the amenities that make living at the Willoughby Townhomes important to him. "A home is special when it reflects who you are as a person," says Nelson. "It's very comfortable to live in, so you feel like you can relax."

Entertaining Made Easy

Living in an apartment wasn't financially smart for Sophia Kim, a physician with St. Paul Internists. "I figured it was about time for me to buy something," thirty-five year-old Kim says. Since she's single and lives alone, Kim wanted a building that was secure and near the downtown St. Paul area so she could walk to her office. Plus, she didn't want to be tied down with any maintenance responsibilities. "Time is precious to me," says Kim. "I don't want to add on to a busy day already. I want my free time to be filled with more fun things." After narrowing down her options, Kim purchased and moved into the 9th Street Lofts near downtown St. Paul in October. "It fits my personality, it fits what I enjoy doing," Kim says. "I'm a pretty outgoing person and I like to entertain."

Besides hosting dinner parties for her friends in the open-spaced loft, Kim enjoys the running, biking, and inline-skating trails along the nearby Mississippi River. Since Kim also travels whenever possible to visit friends or relatives, she can leave her loft without concern of someone breaking in or of a building-maintenance problem. "I don't even give my absence a second thought as far as burglary and theft or if something happened, like the ceiling leaking," says Kim. "It would get taken care of." ♦

Homeowners are lining up to buy the Twin Cities' most popular new homes—lofts and condominiums.

Sold On Condos

By Fran Howard



Midtown Lofts in Minneapolis

PHOTO BY ALEX STERNBERG

Whether called a loft, condominium, or the more casual condo, a spate of new single-level living spaces are being built in the Twin Cities' traditional urban neighborhoods, in both downtowns, and on premier suburban lots—and homeowners are snapping them up. From Prescott, Wisconsin, to the shores of Lake Minnetonka, developers are tearing down obsolete properties and erecting multifamily buildings in prime locations to attract young professionals, couples without children, empty nesters, and buyers of vacation homes. Last year, 40 percent or so of all new housing units built in the metro area were multifamily, indicating that a large segment of the population is looking for more modern living space, less yard work, and a few common amenities.

Urban Style

Similar to true lofts in converted warehouse buildings that feature high ceilings, large windows, and creative use of light, Midtown Lofts in Minneapolis's Uptown neighborhood are finished in the loft style. The units have frosted, transparent doors and interior windows to spread light throughout the living areas. Also in line with true lofts, Midtown's loft-style units offer exposed concrete ceilings and movable kitchen islands to give unit owners the option of opening up the space for entertaining. Built by Lander Sherman Urban Development, a Minneapolis-based company that has been building new and converted lofts in the Twin Cities since 1990, Midtown Lofts offers multilevel townhomes, as well as single-level units, all of which can be finished in a loft or traditional style. And, while 65 percent of the Midtown development's

units have been finished in the loft style, more traditionally styled units have finished ceilings, fixed kitchen islands, carpeting in many rooms, and walls that separate bedrooms, rather than the more temporary dividers commonly found in loft conversions.

Located on the west shore of Lake Minnetonka, The Mist in Spring Park is another development that offers loft-style finishing in condos developed by Edna-based The Cornerstone Group. Finishes at The Mist, which will be ready for occupancy in spring 2006, include exposed concrete ceilings and floor-to-ceiling windows. Homeowners can also choose from a more traditional look.

Another urban-style development just outside the Twin Cities, Eagles Point at the St. Croix is located in Prescott, Wisconsin. Developed by Prescott Land Development, the

units are referred to as condos but share many of the same amenities as lofts with their open floor plans, high ceilings, and nearly floor-to-ceiling windows. In order to achieve this look, the developer uses a unique construction technique in which high-tension cables are pulled taut through hardened concrete to allow for larger, more-open floor plans and dramatic floor-to-ceiling windows in select units.

The units in The Groveland in downtown

Minneapolis share open floor plans, large windows to spread light throughout the units, and high ceilings similar to lofts, but all units are finished in more ornate style. Rather than emulating the complete loft look, the Groveland will fit in with the historic Loring Park neighborhood. “We are build-



Midtown Lofts

ing a very classy, classic building to fit with the neighborhood,” says Kerry Bader, vice president of sales and marketing for The Groveland. Residents will be welcomed into a majestic two-story lobby with a limestone floor, Italian chandelier, and curved ornamental stairway. The Groveland is



The Village at Mendota Heights

scheduled for completion in spring 2006, and offers 133 units and approximately twenty-five different floor plans, including townhomes with private entrances.

Green Spaces, Great Views

While homeowners might be ready to give up the yard work, many of them still want to be near green spaces. "In an urban setting, green space needs to be done consciously," says Wren Aigaki-Lander of Lander Sherman, adding that Mid-

town's courtyard and center fountain are hard-to-find urban amenities. Midtown Lofts is also located on the Midtown Greenway (between Colfax and Bryant Avenues), which leads to the Chain of Lakes. Another benefit to urban living in our great state is while you're not far from the greenery, you still can get fantastic panoramic views of the Minneapolis and St. Paul skylines. Some Midtown units, for example, provide magnificent views of the downtown skyway or Uptown business district.

Already situated within the greenery of Loring Park, The Groveland features a large landscaped plaza with potted plants, trees, and patio furniture. The Groveland also boasts a rooftop sun deck with magnificent views of the downtown skyline, and an outdoor area for pets, complete with plastic bag dispenser.

On the Waterfront

Other homeowners are trading in their backyards for proximity to water. Eagles Point sits proudly on the banks of the St. Croix, just yards from its confluence with the Mississippi. All Eagles Point condos have a full view of the St. Croix River, the St. Croix Marina, as well as Eagles Point and an offshore island inhabited by nesting bald eagles. "We took a blighted

piece of property, grain elevators that were in disrepair for thirty years, and in partnership with the city of Prescott, revitalized the area,” says Dave Weber, co-owner of Prescott Land Development. The only thing separating the river and the building, which sits just fifty feet from shore, is a new walkway and park. Weber notes that “the Department of Natural Resources actually wanted a larger area for boat storage, so the building got pushed closer to the water.” Condo owners at Eagles Point will have access to boat slips at the St. Croix Marina and on-site boat storage.

On the other side of the Cities, most units and almost every window at The Mist will have unspoiled views of glorious Lake Minnetonka. To take full advantage of the lake, unit owners will also have access to twenty-seven boat slips and large terraces. “The Mist offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to live on Lake Minnetonka,” says Wayne Olson, co-project manager.

Uncommon Common Areas

In addition to freedom from home maintenance, new units offer conveniences like common areas that make the transition to compact living easier. The Mist’s common areas include a fitness room, party room, concierge service, and of-



The Village at Mendota Heights

fice space. Owners will also have the convenience of access to shops and restaurants in the first floor’s retail space. At The Groveland, common areas include a community room with a fireplace and a full kitchen that lets guests access the outdoor plaza. And a unique feature of Eagles Point is its guest room, a common area with two queen beds and a small kitchen that unit owners can rent for \$50 a night when visitors come to stay. With extra spaces to entertain your friends and put up your overnight guests, you shouldn’t miss that single-family home at all. ♦



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX STEINBERG PHOT

**Living Green in a
Luxurious Urban Loft
Lander Group
Midtown Lofts
2829 Colfax Ave. S., Unit #306
Minneapolis, \$339,000**

Tucked between Minneapolis's Uptown and Lyn-Lake areas, Midtown Lofts by the Lander Group is a new townhome and loft development in a primarily residential neighborhood. Midtown Lofts is part of the first phase of an "urban village," an initiative among the city, urban planners and developers, and housing experts. The area fronts on the Midtown Greenway with its pedestrian and biking paths and offers the best of city living, with home prices from about \$300,000.

Midtown Lofts' three stylish buildings of seventy-two townhomes and lofts frame a spacious outdoor courtyard with center fountain. The Lander Group's design also reflects its commitment to energy efficiency, environmental conservation, and comfort. In building green, the Lander Group began with well-insulated building envelopes with fresh-air exchange to increase air quality. Materials are carefully selected, like recycled-content sheetrock and low volatile organic compound paints and finishes.

The EasyStreetSM Green Loft is airy and sunlit. At just over 1,000 square feet, this model demonstrates how we can live comfortably, even luxuriously, in concert with the environment. The home also has surround sound and is wired for ca-

ble and high-speed Internet access. The loft has ten-foot ceilings and is surrounded by 7.5-foot-tall energy-efficient windows with top-down and bottom-up shades. Minimal walls and sleek built-ins define the space. The sustainable bamboo flooring is beautiful and durable. The loft's modern interior is highlighted by the kitchen with its contemporary cabinets of formaldehyde-free ResinCore 1 and Energy-Star-rated appliances, built-in water filter, Minnesota Cold Spring matte granite countertops, and a stainless steel-topped island.

Dividing the master bedroom and the kitchen/living/dining area is a partial wall that gives the illusion of transparency. The dividing wall is also a frame for a plasma TV that can be flipped to face either the living area or bedroom. The bedroom has an oversized walk-in closet and full bath. Opening from the master bedroom or off the foyer, the shower/bath area can be closed off with a pocket door to become a guest powder room. The bath features a ceramic soaking tub with shower, IKEA vanity, high-performance, low-flow faucets and showerhead, and water-conserving toilet.

Off the foyer, with easy access to the bathroom is a versatile office/den, or guest room, with carpeting that's actually squares of recycled/recyclable materials that you can pick up separately and wash. And you can step outside, too, to your own private balcony. ♦