

A photograph of a dining room. In the foreground, a dark wood dining table is set with a large, textured, olive-green ceramic bowl. White chairs are visible around the table. In the background, a dark wood console table holds a lamp with a white shade and a dark base, and a small arrangement of red and orange decorative items. A large window behind the console table offers a view of green trees and a building with archways. A white, bowl-shaped chandelier hangs from the ceiling.

# Classically Cool

A CONDO CONVERSION BLENDS MODERN AMENITIES AND VINTAGE CHARM  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN GRANEN STAGING AND STYLING BY MARY GRANEN

Vintage-style chandeliers tastefully illuminate the dining rooms. Opposite page: The Pittsburgh's original archways and other distinctive exterior elements were preserved and freshened up.

THE PITTSBURGH



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Developer Ben Rankin is passionate about preserving the past, but he also has a practical streak. “I’m a renovator, not a restorer,” explains Rankin. The co-owner of Seattle’s Pioneer Property Group and his partner Chad Barron (whose great-grandfather, Jack Barron, built the Sun Mountain Lodge in Winthrop) are in the process of turning four pre-1940 Seattle apartment buildings into a perfect blend of yester-year charm and modern amenities.

One of these conversion projects is The Pittsburgh, located just north of Seattle Center, comprised of four stately, circa 1907 brick buildings with 31 units. When it came on the market last summer, the other bidders had planned to tear it down for new construction, says Rankin. “But when we spoke to the owner, he said he had confidence that we would do right by the building by preserving what we could.” He adds, “I think Belltown suffered when many of its nice, older one-, two- and three-story buildings were turned into high-rises. Urban neighborhoods should have a strongly varied streetscape, with different building heights and materials.”

The developers kept The Pittsburgh’s layout intact. The only updates to touch its timeless brick façade, which includes period features such as Juliet balconies, curved archways and ironwork, were new windows and a little masonry and painting. Instead, the renovation work was focused on interior system upgrades: the bulk of the electrical, plumbing and heating systems were replaced, and the wood-burning fireplaces were exchanged for more convenient gas fireplaces in most units. The kitchens and baths also received overhauls, but a number of existing elements were preserved, including some of the original upper kitchen cabinets and many of the original claw foot tubs.

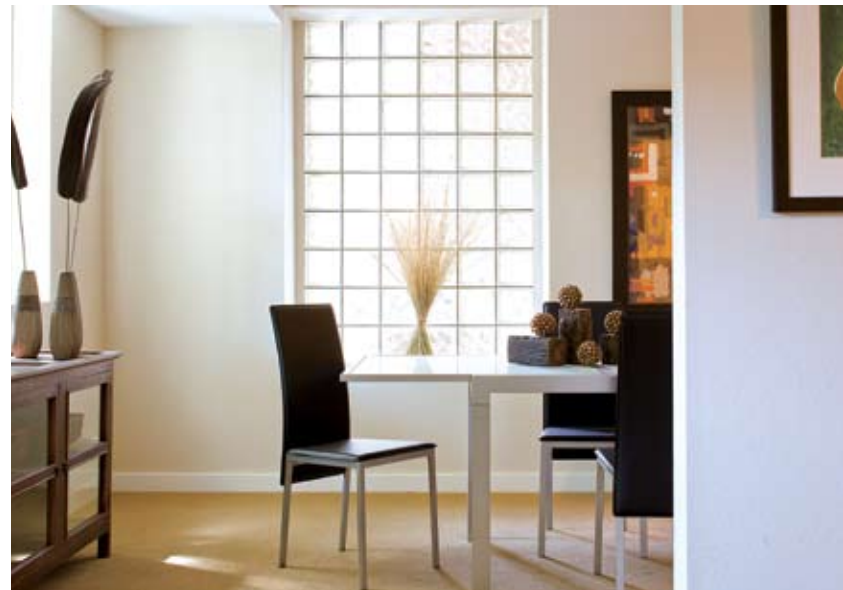
Another original detail in the studio and one- and two-bedroom condos that was retained were the elegant built-in china cabinets with leaded glass doors in the living room. “The china cabinets are one of the original features we looked at and thought, ‘That’s beautiful,’”



remarks Rankin. “Some buyers have told us they would rather have a closet there, but we chose to keep the cabinets and let the buyers decide on their own.” New vintage-style light fixtures and hardware remain true to the interiors original aesthetic.

One couple already sold on The Pittsburgh’s style is Rebecca and Jeff Krida (president and CEO of Cruise West). Rebecca actually had spotted the building while she was house-hunting in Queen Anne after they relocated from North Carolina in 2000. “I fell in love with it, the vintage architecture, the stone and concrete [details] and the great location,” she says. “I told Jeff about this wonderful old building I had found, but we had no need for an apartment... We never forgot about it, though.” Recently, when the couple began building a retirement house in Baja, California, they decided to buy a condo in Seattle so they could split their time between the two areas. “Right when we were thinking we wanted to buy a condo, I drove by The Pittsburgh and saw that it was being converted,” says Rebecca. “I knocked on the door, got a tour from a guy in a hardhat and we bought our [one-bedroom] unit the next day.” She adds, “I enjoy the charm of older buildings, and I also like the ghosts and spirits that come with them.” +

**Team >>** **Developers:** Ben Rankin and Chad Barron, Pioneer Property Group, 114 1/2 First Ave., Suite 1, Seattle; 206.223.0970; pioneerpg.com **Designer:** Pioneer Property Group Design Team **Contractor:** Pioneer Construction Management **Price:** \$150,000 for the smallest studio (255 square feet) and \$450,000 for the largest two-bedroom (867 square feet); for more info on The Pittsburgh, as well as Pioneer Property’s three other vintage building conversions, visit livehistoric.com **Tip on buying a converted condo:** Ben Rankin says, “Look for a place that has had system upgrades, otherwise the work might be passed off to you.”



**Clockwise from top: The new living room shows off its restored hardwood floors and bay window, which was upgraded with new energy-efficient windows. Contemporary accents are right at home in the vintage Pittsburgh. Original elements preserved include built-in cabinets with leaded glass doors. The plain-Jane pre-remodel living room. Opposite page: New landscaping and teak benches and chairs in the shared courtyard transformed a shabby-looking space into a peaceful place where residents can enjoy the outdoors.**