

An Assemi vision



Business Street Photos by Jack Tunney

Local artist and developer Reza Assemi stands on a balcony overlooking the Vagabond Lofts.

Pyramid Homes and Granville Homes team up to offer Vagabond Lofts, affordable living spaces in downtown Fresno

by James Olinger
Business Street

Fresno, CA – Local artist and developer Reza Assemi relaxed comfortably in one of the 38 lofts he designed, and gazed at the sophisticated art that ordained the walls. The former site of the outdated Vagabond Motel at the corner of Broadway and Amador had been reduced to a memory, to make way for a new generation of downtown Fresno residents.

"I've done artwork my whole life," said Assemi, who said that he has been in development since he was 24 years old. "It was a lot of work to put this together, to bring the community and artists downtown."

"I love downtown Fresno, and anything that brings people down here."

The ribbon cutting ceremony on July 31 attracted many, some who were too young to remember the last time a housing development had arrived in the downtown area about a

quarter of a century ago. Craig Scharon, chief executive of the Central Valley Business Incubator, was impressed with the quality of the lofts.

"I came here earlier to check out the construction projects; it's nice to see the finished product," said Scharon.

The \$5 million venture, which is a mixed-use project by both Pyramid Homes and Granville Homes, places residential space over commercial. The apartments have granite countertops in the bathroom and kitchen areas, as well as concrete and hardwood floors, and are furnished by Hemisphere Furniture. Vagabond Lofts is a gated community, with 39 available parking spaces. There is a courtyard with sculptures



A bedroom at one of the new Vagabond Lofts.

and murals, which is ideal for different events and community gatherings. The lofts themselves are being rented at rates from \$625 to \$1,100 a month.

Assemi said that some of the nearly 10,000 feet of commercial space could be used for art studios and galleries, small offices and shops, or maybe even a boutique.

"I think this is going to directly affect ArtHop," said Assemi, regarding the program that showcases the

work of local artists.

Artist and photographer Shannon Hunter from Fresno has taken advantage of the new living areas, and works at a studio three blocks down the street from the lofts. She said she

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spends most of her time downtown, and relishes the idea of being able to both live and work there.

"What young person doesn't want to live downtown? It's vibrant," said Hunter, who also said that out of all her friends, a good handful have expressed interest in the apartments.

Artists weren't the only ones who took notice of the incoming dwellings. Assemi said that the residents of a local hospital loved the idea of having an apartment downtown. There was even talk of Vagabond outside of Fresno.

"It's a really interesting and diverse group, but they all relate the same to downtown," said Assemi, who also mentioned that the spaces would probably be full by the end of the month.

Reza's father, Massoud Assemi, said that people in Fresno have been talking about reviving their downtown for years, and this

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kind of downtown housing is a step in the right direction.

"I feel good, I'm very proud of him, he's very focused," said Massoud of his son. "We are here because of him."

With talk of other housing developments planned for downtown Fresno, Reza sees the possibility of a transformation of the area, especially if Vagabond Lofts continues to be



Shannon Hunter of Fresno stands in one of the lofts, where she will be living. Hunter, an artist and photographer, works just three blocks down the street from the lofts.

well-received.

"Within four years, I see a lot more life here, hopefully a lot more businesses too."