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There's no place like home away from home

By Allyson Manet

NOT MANY LUXURY LISTINGS SELL FOR \$5,000, especially in the last quarter-century of their history, but in the core of Over-the-Rhine in Cincinnati, that's often exactly what you'll find.

And in the case of this four-unit building in the center of one of the city's oldest and most desirable neighborhoods, the phrase "location is everything" couldn't ring any more true.

Valerie Crow Jacobs and Vickie Thornton saw vibrant, energized OTR as the perfect place to not just invest in real estate, but to create a rental space dedicated to out-of-towners looking to enjoy some of the best features the city has to offer. After completing renovations that they say were 80 percent finished by the previous owner, the sisters listed the property on Airbnb and VRBO and quickly realized just how desirable their location was.

"It's incredible to see how many people want to be right here in the middle of everything," Valerie said. "They want to go out and be out, and then have a home to come back to," noting that there aren't hotels within walking distance that serve the millennial crowd looking to enjoy a night in OTR.

The previous owner had purchased the property in 2011, pouring his heart into renovating an old building in what he hoped would turn into a must-live neighborhood. At the time of purchase, the building was uninhabitable and the area's revitalization still nascent. But by the end of his four-year tenure, the first- and third-floor units were finished and OTR was thriving — giving Vickie and Valerie two units to develop themselves in the heart of the city's fastest growing neighborhood.



Photo by Steve Ziegelmeyer



OVER-THE-RHINE



“The exposed beams in the upstairs loft and the hardwood floors throughout are all original,” said Vickie, “which is really special in a home this old.”

Built in 1880, the brick Italianate building is easy to find — tucked into a side street less than two blocks from such popular OTR spots as MOTR, Pontiac BBQ, Japp’s and Holtman’s Donuts — just a few of the reasons it draws such a high demand for weekend rental.

“People stay here because they want to get out and do things, not because they want to be settled in making breakfast,” said Vickie from the small but tasteful kitchen in the upstairs, two-story loft unit. “They love the architecture, the design, but really — it’s about being close to the things they want to do.”

And with Washington Park, Cincinnati Music Hall, countless restaurants and bars and even Jack Casino within walking distance, options for entertainment abound. A quick hop onto a Red Bike or the Cincinnati Bell Connector and you’re in Findlay Market, or The Banks, or nearly anywhere in the heart of Cincinnati within minutes.

Which, of course, is exactly what 20- and 30-somethings visiting Cincinnati are hoping for. But those aren’t the only people staying in the 136-year-old home.

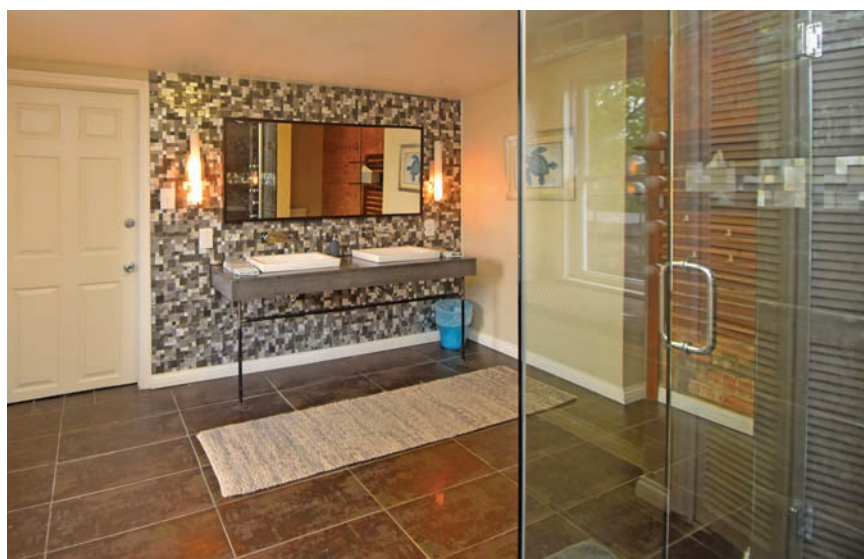
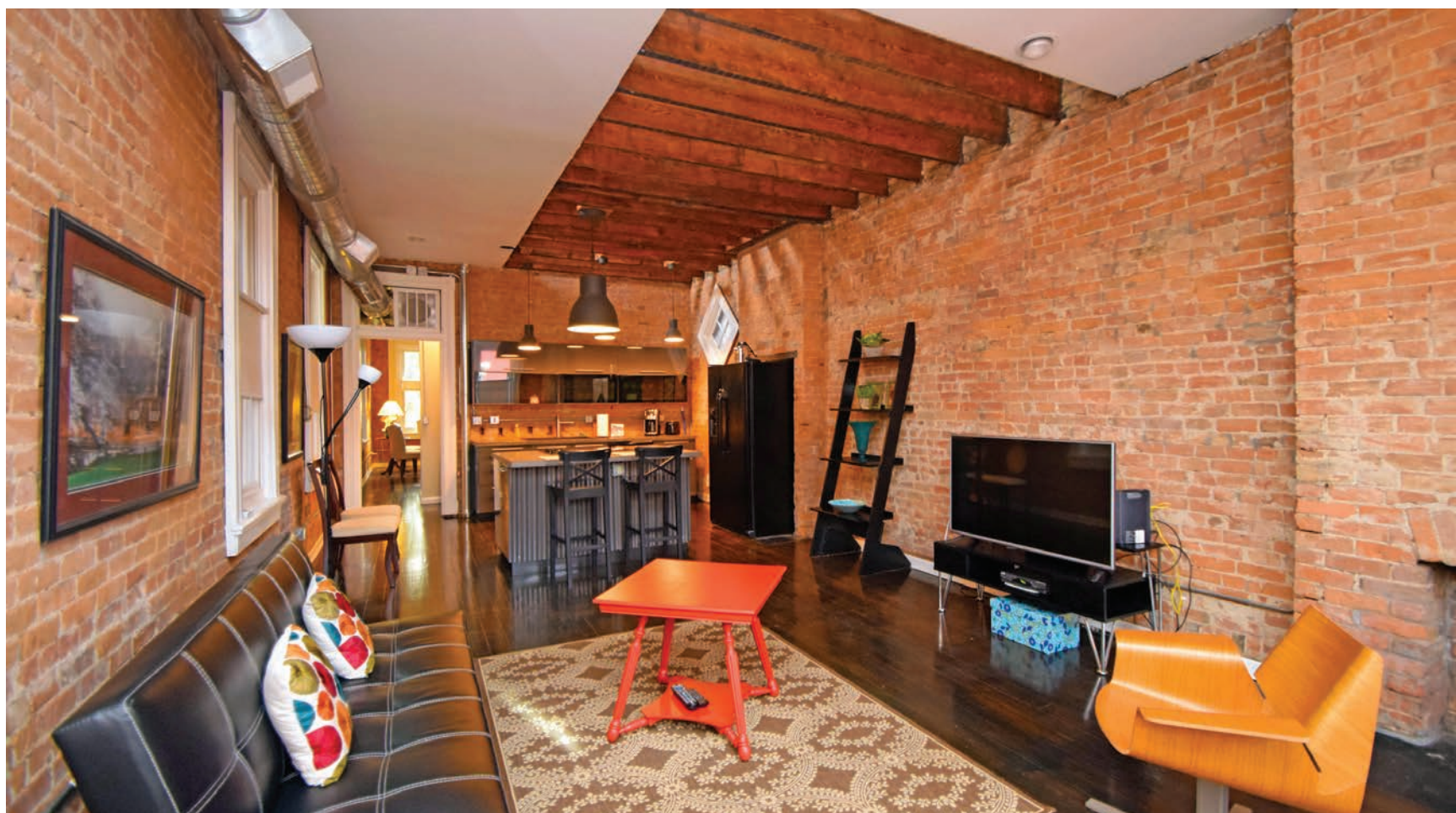
“We actually see a handful of families who rent the entire building for family gatherings and holidays — people who’d rather be under one roof than in four or five hotel rooms,” said Vickie. Valerie didn’t miss a beat, adding, “And corporate customers who stay regularly when they’re in town for business.”

Regardless of why they’re visiting, the fact remains that people are traveling to Cincinnati — and in particular, to Over-the-Rhine. What was once dubbed the nation’s most dangerous neighborhood now welcomes visitors of all backgrounds and ages with open arms, thoughtfully prepared food, craft beers and donuts. For many out-of-towners, spending a day soaking in one-of-a-kind tastes and experiences just to return to a standard hotel room — no matter how luxurious —leaves a bit to be desired. Staying right in the heart of everything, in a space that maintains the integrity of the building while incorporating essential modern updates, keeps the authenticity of the visit alive.

Listing on Airbnb has come with some life lessons for the sisters — much like learning how to be partners in real estate investment while staying on speaking terms as family — but they agree that the venture has been a very positive experience. They also agree that they’ve been pleasantly surprised by how respectful their visitors have been of the space.

Perhaps because when where you’re staying feels like home — only better, because your home is not within throwing distance of a retro video game arcade —you treat it more like your own.





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Comey & Shepherd
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ABOUT THE HOUSE

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- Qualifies for tax abatement
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