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Eight Orchids, Oakland Condos blossom near City Center

Valerie Fahey, Special to The Chronicle
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Eight Orchids, straddling the corner of Seventh Street and Broadway in Oakland, is where East meets West and cultures intertwine. It includes 157 condominiums above 6,000 square feet of ground-level retail shops and two floors of parking.

The numeral 8 in the developments' name was not chosen randomly. To the Chinese, eight is a lucky number that stands for prosperity and good fortune. When you take the numeral and turn it on its side, it becomes the symbol for infinity - forever. Triple it and you've got 888 - three times the luck and the last three digits of the price tags on the condos. Is it any wonder then, that the Opening Ceremonies of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing will be held on Aug. 8, or 8/8/08?

Eight Orchids is built on the former site of a Howard Johnson's motel in Chinatown, within walking distance of the Oakland Museum and City Center shops. The development is within a few blocks of two

BART stations (12th Street and Lake Merritt) and three bus lines, while the Amtrak station and the Ferry terminal at Jack London Square are about eight blocks away.

As a nod to the flagging housing market, the builders have a short-term incentive in place for nine buyers. Five one-bedroom condominium homes are available for less than the listed \$350,888 and four two-bedroom homes are available for less than \$499,888. All luxury features are included. Wells Fargo and Bank of America representatives are on site on weekends to make loans and answer questions about financing.

Sixteen floor plans are offered in a mix of townhouses and single-level plans ranging from a 770-square-foot one-bedroom, one-bath home to a 1,645-square-foot three-bedroom, two-bath home. Prices range from \$349,888 for a one-bedroom to \$775,888 for one of the townhouses.

The housing units start on the third floor and extend to the 11th floor. There is an airy, spare rooftop garden on the fifth floor with nearly 360-degree views of the bay and the Berkeley, Oakland and Marin hills.

Many of the units, especially those on the upper floors, offer beautiful views of the Oakland and San Francisco skylines, the East Bay hills and the bay.

All of the units have cat-5 wiring for fast Internet and communications, and Energy Star stainless steel appliances. Hookups accommodate a stackable washer/dryer, too.

Air conditioning is installed in every unit but shouldn't be needed except for a handful of days per year, as the mercury rarely rises into the 90s this close to the bay.

To allow for lots of natural daylight and to foster a sense of community, the nine floors share not only the rooftop garden and a third-floor courtyard, but also a community room called the Banyan Tree Lounge.

Several units have floor-to-ceiling windows, making them light and bright even on an overcast day. There are few tall buildings in the area to obstruct the views or block the natural light. Triple-paned windows are on the sides of the building that face Broadway and Seventh, limiting the city sounds and replacing them with a low hum of white noise.

One mid-priced unit on a recent tour - the two-bedroom, two-bath home that lists for \$525,888 - is part of a family of floor plans called Plan 11; prices vary depending on which floor the unit is on and scope of the views.

Before entering these new homes, visitors are struck by the grand statement of the building itself with its interesting vertical lines and

detail, and then upon entering the lobby with its 20-foot ceilings.

Upstairs, a double-wide, mint-green hallway leads to the two-bedroom unit's front door and opens to a defined tiled entry with a coat closet separating the front door from the kitchen.

The U-shaped kitchen has ample storage space with two pantries in addition to the cabinets and is outfitted with contoured granite countertops, alder-wood cabinets and GE stainless steel appliances, including a gas range.

The living-cum-dining room has three-quarter-length windows and a door leading to the balcony, and it shares a snack counter/cutout wall with the kitchen.

The generous master bedroom and bath, taking up about a third of the square footage of the unit, sits to the left of the living/dining room. The bedroom, though smallish, feels bigger with its wall of windows.

A hall and the spacious walk-in closet sit between the bedroom and bath and add another level of privacy for the early riser who wants to start the day with morning ablutions while the snooze-button sleeper remains in the bed. The master bath has dual sinks set in granite, a soaking tub and a glass shower stall.

As an option on Plan 11, the master bedroom can lose its angled wall,

the entryway coat closet can move to the right of the front door, and one of the pantry closets can be eliminated, adding 9 additional square feet of living space.

Within walking distance is the Oakland waterfront with access to the shoreline trail, as well as Jack London Square, home to retailers, hotels and restaurants. Occupants include Barnes & Noble; a multiscreen cinema; Bed, Bath & Beyond; and Yoshi's restaurant and nightclub.

The Jack London Square Farmers' Market is open on Sundays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

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