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‘This is a very distinctive experience’: Former Rostad foundry in Grafton being converted to chic business condos

By Lisa Curtis - News Graphic Staff Dec 24, 2024

GRAFTON — He might not have coined the term, but Joe Locher came to the word “pyschitecture” on his own over the course of many years of tapping into emotional and intellectual muses to craft everything from commercial messages to dining tables made from trees.

Locher and his wife, Karen, who lived in Bay View for many years, used a mix of psychology and architecture when they moved to Cedarburg and renovated a property with an old Cream City brick farmhouse. And they did it again when they moved to Grafton.

Now they are incorporating the inspiration of industrialist and artist Merlin Rostad to turn his former Grafton foundry into some of the most unique business condominiums on the market.

“The whole building has that kind of wonder to it,” Joe Locher said.

The 35,000-square-foot building at 1411 6th Ave. is unremarkable on the outside, but the inside reveals incredibly detailed midcentury modern touches not typically found in a factory office.

Karen Locher, a metalsmith and jewelry designer and creator, is especially fond of aluminum chainmail mesh curtains in the building’s entry. There are spiral staircases and cast aluminum features set into the wall.

“It’s almost church-like,” Joe Locher said.



Joe and Karen Locher pictured in one of the customizable suites for sale at their Goldfinger property in Grafton.

Creative thinking has always been a job requirement for Joe Locher. He’s had a long career in the advertising business, starting his own business, Lyrical, in 1995. Locher is responsible for the Silver Lining campaign, in which West Bend Insurance tells people that “the worst brings out our best.” He also wrote ProHealth Care’s “I’ve Got a Reason to Live” campaign. Locher also works with police departments around the country, including in New York, New Orleans and Baltimore, creating police officer recruitment campaigns. “There’s no room to be irreverent,” he said. “These are life-and-death things that people are scared of.”

But his creativity is not limited to advertising. Locher works in an eclectic mix of mediums, including wood-working, painting, poetry, architecture and short films. He wrote three short films about survivors of Hurricane Katrina that were broadcast during HBO’s Comic Relief 2006 special. The films featured voiceovers by

(cont) Billy Crystal, Jeffrey Tambor and Rebecca Romijn.

Karen Locher uses inspiration from nature, the body's energy, a client's personal story and elsewhere to find inspiration for her jewelry.

Now together the Lochers are making their mark in the commercial real estate business, selling their business suites, not leasing them as others do. They call their company Goldfinger Properties.

Locher said he called the company Goldfinger Properties because it has a supervillain ring to it, and “supervillains always have the coolest spaces.”

The foundry has a remarkable amount of flexibility in both unit sizes and uses.

Rostad Aluminum Corp. was founded in 1953 and has been producing aluminum permanent mold castings for a variety of industrial applications there since last spring, though it was no longer owned by the Rostad family, Locher said.

Merlin Rostad served as mayor of Cedarburg from 1956 to 1964. He also was an artist, designing large scale aluminum sculptures that can be seen everywhere from the Cedarburg Public Library to Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn.

The former factory was divided into spaces for a lobby, offices, a conference room and, of course, the foundry



An example of a wide open space with many opportunities for customized uses.



The Lochers have already customized a business suite with a 1920's back bar from Paris. They have ordered four chandeliers for the room, however, potential buyers can design the room any way they like.

work. There is a galley kitchen, restored polished terrazzo and parquet floors, a loading dock, a large parking lot and green space out back.

“This is a very distinctive experience,” Joe Locher said. A car collector himself, he thinks the suites would make an exceptional backdrop for a car collection. They have already sold a 6,000-square-foot space to a family for its car collection.

But the Lochers see potential for much more. Suites could be created for an art gallery, an event space or a wellness center that could house individual practitioners.

The suites could be as small as 800 square feet and as large as 15,000 square feet. It is all customizable.

The Lochers will keep about 15% for themselves, because they believe in the building so much and understand how rare such an experience is.

Joe Locher said he called the company Goldfinger Properties because it has a supervillain ring to it, and “supervillains always have the coolest spaces. And we liked that idea of adding some fun to the venture, but also the fact that rescuing an old building and turning it into something valuable again is a form of the Midas touch,” he said.

Anyone who is interested in learning more about the property and/or to get a tour can contact Paul Monigal at Corley Real Estate (262) 951-8497.