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Jupiter townhouses let small business owners get above the commute

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When real estate agent Victoria Copani heard about the new townhouses going up in her neighborhood near the Abacoa town center, she immediately saw the potential of the limited live/work units for sale.

Within days, Copani bought a unit for herself and one as an investment. Living and working in the same place, avoiding a long commute and being home for her 11-year-old daughter after school made it an easy decision.

Of the 280 townhouses being constructed in Antigua by Town & Country Homes, only 72 were designed to provide both living and working space. The city of Jupiter limits the kind of businesses that can occupy the space, but includes many retail businesses. The units border the project and will one day be part of the expansion of the Abacoa town center. The units provide a great room that can be used for a number of commercial purposes, a handicapped-accessible restroom and a graded front entrance that eliminates the stairs in front of the all-residential units.

The businesses don't have storefronts, but are allowed a small sign outside. Already in business are a gift store, homebuilder, hair salon and flower shop. Copani has decorated her Estate Property Services office in floral prints and a cheerful pink hue.

"It's the best move I ever made," said Copani. "I admit they're not for everyone, because some of my friends say they would never go up three flights of stairs everyday."

Jill Egan, a sales person at Antigua said there was a waiting list for the live/work units as soon as they went on the market. In January 2003, an interior live/work townhouse with three bedrooms, two-and-a-half baths and a two-car garage sold for \$281,000. Last month, the same townhouse sold for \$529,000, said Egan.

Carlos and Gloria Rivera sold their flower shop in New York after 13 years in business to move into Antigua. They have no family or friends in the area, but came anyway when a friend in New York told them about the new townhouses. They opened Orchid Flowers next door to Copani.

"It's always hard to open a new business where no one knows you yet," said Gloria Rivera. "But we've done pretty well, considering."

A few doors down, Linda Reinek and her daughter bought two units for their Salon La Brea hair salon. They plan to break through an adjoining wall to double their space.

"We already have a following from the surrounding area," said Reinek. "But we've been getting people from all over

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Abacoa who are excited that we're here."

The live/work concept is not new. In 1996, Orlando's pioneering Celebration planned community offered single-family homes within its home business district. Among the first homes built in Celebration, they allow for businesses to operate out of the home.

"They've always been very much in demand," said Andrea Finger, a Celebration spokeswoman. "No one has had trouble re-selling them."

Several developers are embracing the concept. New Urban Communities, a Delray Beach-based builder, is selling a limited number of live/work units in two of its communities. Mirabella, under construction in Miramar and scheduled for completion in the summer of 2005, will offer 10 live/work units out of a total of 147 townhouses. The company's Belle Isles community in Wilton Manors offers nine live/work townhouses among 51 units. The townhouses in both communities are priced starting at \$300,000.

Although the live/work townhouses in the Antigua development Antigua have been sold out for months, Egan expects owners to re-sell them quickly.

"We had people stumble in to ask for directions and end up buying a unit," said Egan. "A lot of people recognized the investment potential."

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