

# South Florida

## NuRiver Landing created by collaboration of developer brother, artist/designer sister

**By Hortense Leon**

*Florida Real Estate Journal*

It's every artist's dream to have a 25-story building as a canvas. This is how Lorraine Lax, an Orlando-based artist, describes her experience working on NuRiver Landing, a \$200 million, 409-unit luxury condominium in downtown Fort Lauderdale, which was developed by her brother, Jeff Lax, president of NobleHouse LLC in Fort Lauderdale and the Washington, D.C.-based Carlyle Group.

In her work at NuRiver Landing, Lorraine, who has been a director of graphic design projects as well as a fine artist, wore two hats. Although her brother developed NuRiver Landing and had input into the project's overall design, it was her task to work on the interior — not as an interior designer, but as an artist and art consultant for the building's art collection.

Lorraine produced and/or procured about 80 pieces of art for NuRiver Landing's art collection that hangs in the main lobby, mezzanine, spa, rooftop pool deck and adjoining party room. Of the 80 pieces, she created 30 original works herself, mostly paintings as well as two series of photographs.

In addition, the works of well-known artists Tom Corbin, a bronze sculptor based in Kansas City, and wire sculptor Steve Martin, formerly of New Orleans and now of Miami, are featured.

The NuRiver Landing art collection also includes an eclectic group of prints, including historic photographs and nature scenes, with a diversity of styles and colors. Consistent with what Jeff wanted for the image of his building, much of the art work has a contemporary and/or Eastern feel to it, said his sister, including transparent photographs of flowers, which are so delicate and ethereal, they look like paintings.

"Usually art consultants are people with art history degrees but are not fine artists," said Jeff. "But Lorraine wears a lot of different hats," he said. In addition to the work she did for NuRiver Landing, she is an accomplished artist and creative director for graphic design projects in Orlando, said Jeff.

In early December, Lorraine participated in an art opening that was held at the same time as Art Basel, an international art show, on Miami Beach. In 1999, she was



The 25-story, 409-unit NuRiver Landing luxury high-rise condominium situated on Fort Lauderdale's historic New River is in the area's trendy, downtown Las Olas area. The project was developed by Fort Lauderdale-based NobleHouse LLC and Washington, D.C.-based Carlyle Group. Photography by Nathan Selikoff and art direction by Lorraine Lax.

commissioned by developer Phil Rappy to do fine and graphic arts for the Eo Inn, a bed and breakfast hotel in downtown Orlando.

It is no accident that Lorraine and Jeff Lax came to work together. Jeff, who has more than 30 years of experience in the real estate business, including high level positions with Trammell Crow Residential and Insignia Capital Advisors, has a degree in building construction from the University of Florida at Gainesville. But he also studied architecture and has always appreciated the fine arts, he said.

"I know when I see a painting, a sculpture, a building that moves me," said Jeff. "It was advantageous to bring Lorraine in from the beginning to provide an eye for the project," he said. He has a background in historic rehabilitation. In the early 1980s, he was a developer with Century Real Estate, now based in Cambridge, Mass. During his time with the company, he worked on adaptive re-use projects for historic rehabilitations of old mill buildings that were converted to office space in Ashland, Andover and Cambridge, Mass.

"I have been following Lorraine's career for years," said Jeff. "Her sensibilities are unique, because they are broad based. Plus, we have a connection on an emo-

tional level, so it was easy to articulate what I wanted," he said.

"You get all the benefits and burdens of working with a sibling," in situations like this, said Jeff. "As a developer, I try to express things in concrete terms. But she helps me explore the emotional component as well," he said.

"You don't necessarily know if a building makes you feel good or bad," said Jeff. "If there's not enough light, the ceilings are too low or there is too much humidity, you may not be conscious of these things, but you have a total feeling," he said. "When architecture really works, it works in your solar plexus," said Jeff.

"I had to make certain that since I was the primary artist for NuRiver Landing that I not only gave the residents a cohesive look, but that the styles were different enough to satisfy a multitude of tastes," said Lorraine. "I also had to be careful, since I do love producing edgy artwork, that I paid close attention to the building's audience," which includes many young professionals, she said. "My brother was adamant that the artwork not be too heavy, rather that it should have a sense of calm and whimsy," said Lorraine.

"I used my years of directing graphic design projects as well as my experience as a fine artist to



The lobby of NuRiver Landing shows the two-story, atrium/lobby/mezzanine space featuring a 20-foot, floor-to-ceiling mesh metal curtain. The textured, abstract and figurative paintings feature a vibrant color palette that was selected by Lorraine Lax, artist. The seven-foot tall, limited edition, bronze figure was created by Sculptor Tom Corbin. Photography by Nathan Selikoff and art direction by Lorraine Lax.

view the building in total as one large puzzle that needed a thread that would pull it together visually," said Lorraine. "The primary colors I chose for the mezzanine paintings were intentionally drawn directly from the lobby artwork — lime green, chocolate brown, orange/rust tones and lemon yellow. Likewise, motifs, including whimsical, playful figures and flora, were again inspired from the ground level imagery," she said.

"I've been fortunate to be surrounded by talented people, including Lorraine and Tim Techler, (of Techler Design Group, a Watertown, Mass.-based architectural and interior design firm) who was the building's interior designer and who is also a friend of mine," said Jeff. "I have had a long-term relationship with these people and it gives me comfort for them to handle the appropriate tasks," he said.

"I am a minimalist with warmth," said Jeff, in describing what he was aiming for at NuRiver Landing. "Other modern buildings are a little too stark for us," but he wanted something humanistic, he said.

Although there was a lot of effort and talent put into the art on display at NuRiver Landing as well as the design, Jeff said that he can't quantify how much of an affect it all had on the bottom line.

"The marketplace is the grim reaper; it makes heroes or fools of us all, but a well designed project has a better chance," he said.

"There has been a lot of irrationality in the condo market over the last several years," said Jeff, "but that notwithstanding, the art helps.

You want to create a sense of place, an emotional connection with people," he said. "We get a lot of positive feedback. It helps distinguish us from other projects," said Jeff.

"The art in the building moves me; it complements the style of the building and adds to the selling features," said Marc Katz, an artist's representative and artist himself, who has been a resident at NuRiver Landing since last June. "It is amazing to know that all the work was done by Lorraine because her styles are so diverse," he said. "I've heard a lot of compliments on her work by other residents," said Katz.

### Project team credits

**FORT LAUDERDALE** — NuRiver Landing is a \$200 million, 409-unit condominium in downtown Fort Lauderdale. The team for the project includes:

- Development Team
  - Jeff Lax, President, NobleHouse LLC, Fort Lauderdale
  - The Carlyle Group, Washington, D.C.
- Architecture
  - Dorsky Hodgson Parrish Yuce, Cleveland, Ohio
- Interior Design
  - Tim Techler, Techler Design Group, Watertown, Mass.
- Art Program/Primary Building Artist
  - Lorraine Lax, Maitland
- Art Program/Art Consulting
  - Lorraine Lax, creative and production director, Maitland
  - Nathan Selikoff, creative and production support, Orlando