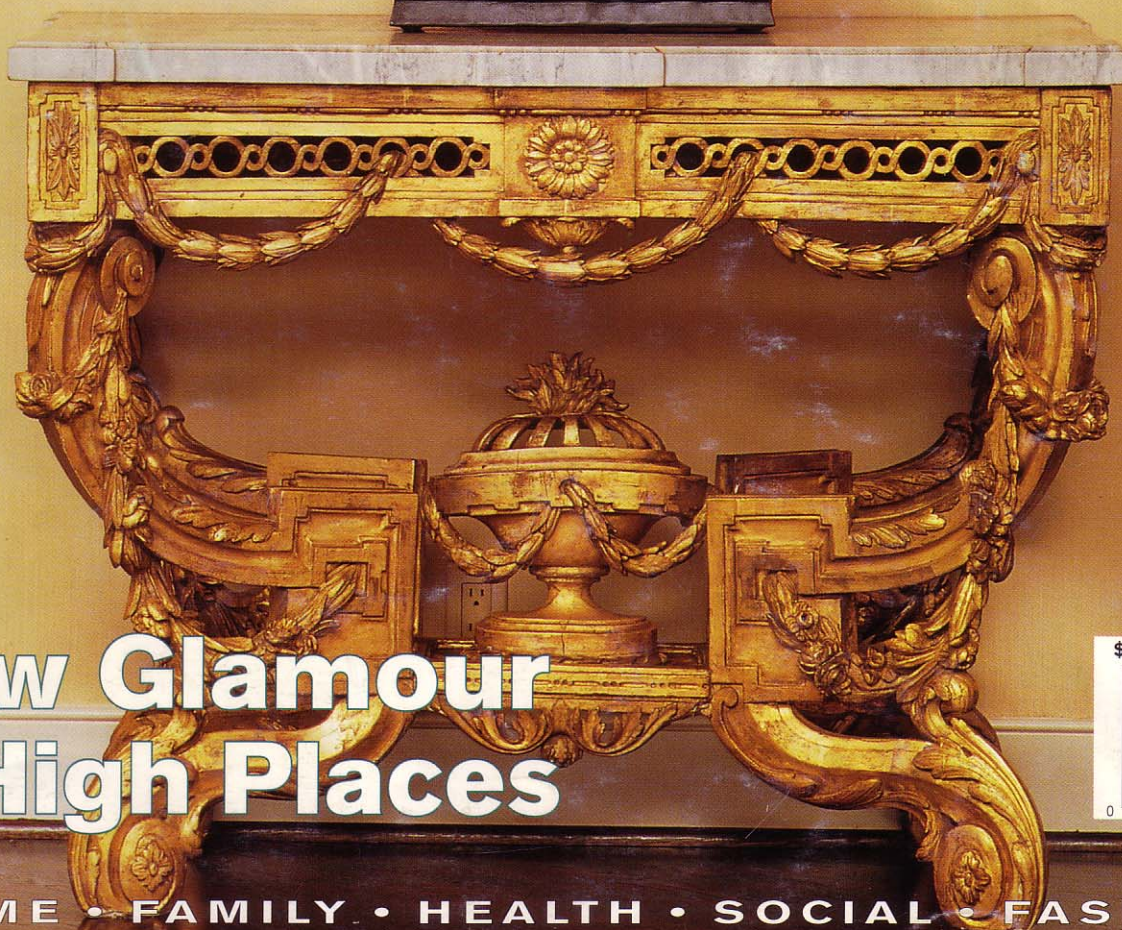
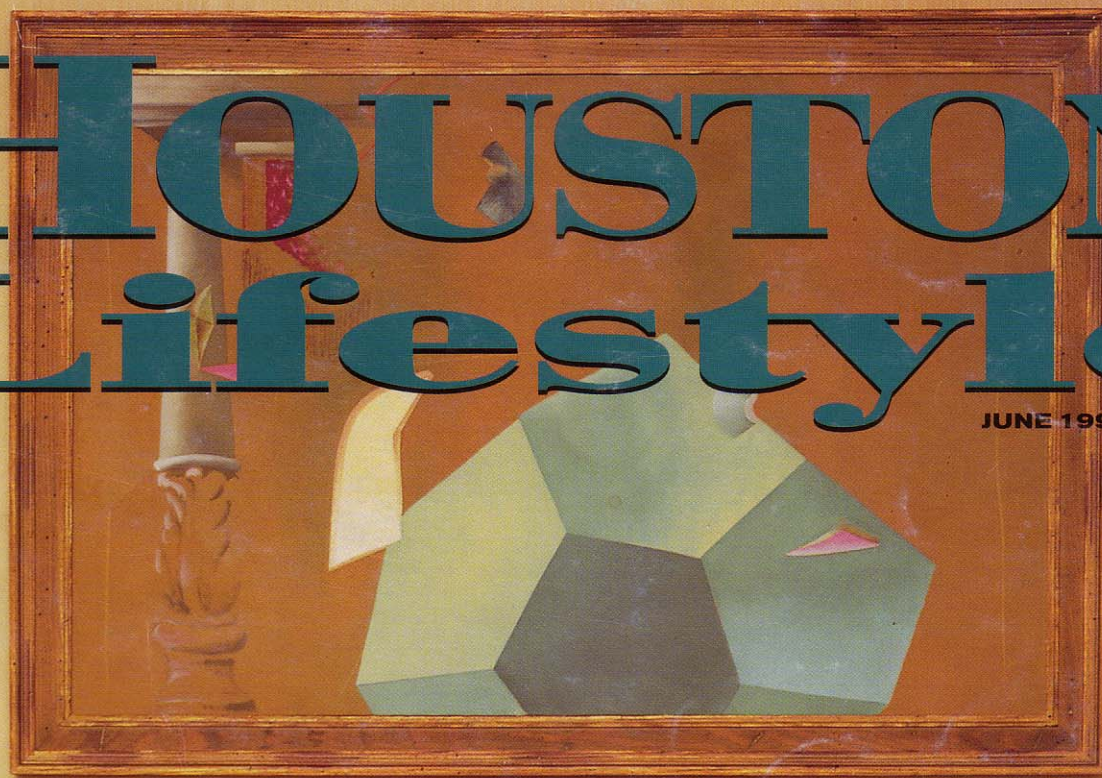


# HOUSTON Lifestyle

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PHOTO BY J. PAMELA PHOTOGRAPHY



Antique black tole box of pomegranates sits atop late 18th century French giltwood console. Painting by Sallé Werner Vaughn, "The Emerging of Platonic Form," 1985.

(right) Marble entry hall floors executed by Sweeney Marble from Wells design. Pair of black side chairs from estate of silent film siren Pola Negri. Console is 19th century Empire, ebonized with gilt, marble top. Louis XV style mirror is carved giltwood, 19th century. Screen is early 19th century. Ceiling paper is Roger Arlington "Chinese Pewter" from Walter Lee Culp. Upholstered walls in Silk Dynasty "Beauvais" from David Sutherland.



# Palaces in The Sky

## High-rise Life Goes Superluxe

Story by Sam A. Houston  
Photography by J. Pamela



**Sitting room, Transco Tower in clouds. French, bronze doré candelabra, circa 1840. Longoria Collection sofa in natural linen, pair of chairs in "Bennison White Flowers." Throw pillows from various antique fabrics. Oriental Soumak carpet in Kilim style.**

‘Life at the top’ is a cliché that has been around longer than tall buildings. Your initial image on reading it might flash onto courtyards, always getting the best table, a private wine cellar with the rarest vintages and a personal domain filled with priceless furnishings; all of which means serious monetary blessings.

More and more these days it includes a spacious condominium in a luxury residential tower, of which Houston has several. As another one broke ground last month, promising to be the top of the heap, *Lifestyle* wanted to glance through a window into this world. We open with a stroll through a penthouse, courtesy of a kind and generous couple who allowed their well-guarded veil of privacy to come down for this interview as a gesture of appreciation to their interior designer.



### Reassessing Priorities

For more than four decades Dr. and Mrs. Jack Castle never once considered quitting their Pine Hollow residence, where they reared their two children in a quiet, tree-filled neighborhood north of Tanglewood near Buffalo Bayou.

Five years ago Castle Dental Centers' co-founder reassessed his priorities. With son Jack, Jr., at the corporate helm, there was freedom for serious travel. More time could be spent at the farm and he could pursue his bird hunting around the world. It was time to shuck the tribulations of an aging house and its grounds. It was time to move.

Castle gently broached the subject to his wife, who had already sworn never to live in a high-rise; she didn't want to lose the privacy of her own home. After numerous "dis-

Their choice was a 5,500-sq.-ft. duplex on the 39th and 40th floors overlooking Post Oak Road.

maying" condominium walk-throughs with a Realtor friend, she remembers, they looked at a recently vacated penthouse in Four-Leaf Towers.

Bingo. He loved it. She still wasn't convinced, but would consider moving only with the proviso that pre-eminent interior designer Herbert Wells would become part of the equation. Wells had worked on Pine Hollow as well as houses for son Jack, Jr.

**Dr. and Mrs. Jack Castle in their penthouse living room. She sits in a Regency lacquer and gilt chair, circa 1840. Dr. Castle rests against a French 18th century limestone mantle and overmantle. In foreground, English Regency sofa, two matching armchairs with ebonized and parcel gilt decoration. Peach Thai silk sofa is Venetian, 18th century, as is fern green commode under a circa 1830 Chinese Chippendale mirror. Aubusson carpet is late 18th century from Stark, NYC. English papier-mâché tray and table, circa 1820.**

Their choice was a 5,500-sq.-ft. duplex on the 39th and 40th floors overlooking Post Oak Road. But first they needed to set straight a previous owner's somewhat eclectic layout.

### View from The Top

Loretta Castle knew Wells would fix all that: "What I wanted was Herb's ability to make the rooms flow, as well as his taste, touch and colors," she recalls. The designer turned three main rooms into one large, naturally lit space, redesigned the spiral stairs and virtually everything else but the private elevator—the construction executed by Builders West. He sought out antiques, utilized pieces they'd collected and when he couldn't find what they needed, had them created by some of the world's best furniture makers.

On a recent visit Wells stands in front of the working fireplace of 18th century carved French limestone, and says of the serene, airy space, "This room is a mixture of things. That carpet is the most beautiful Aubusson I've ever seen," referring to the museum-quality treasure he found in New York, which covers dark oak plank floors laid on a diagonal. "Being French, it sets the pace, although some of the furniture is English and Venetian. Everything in this space was acquired for it."

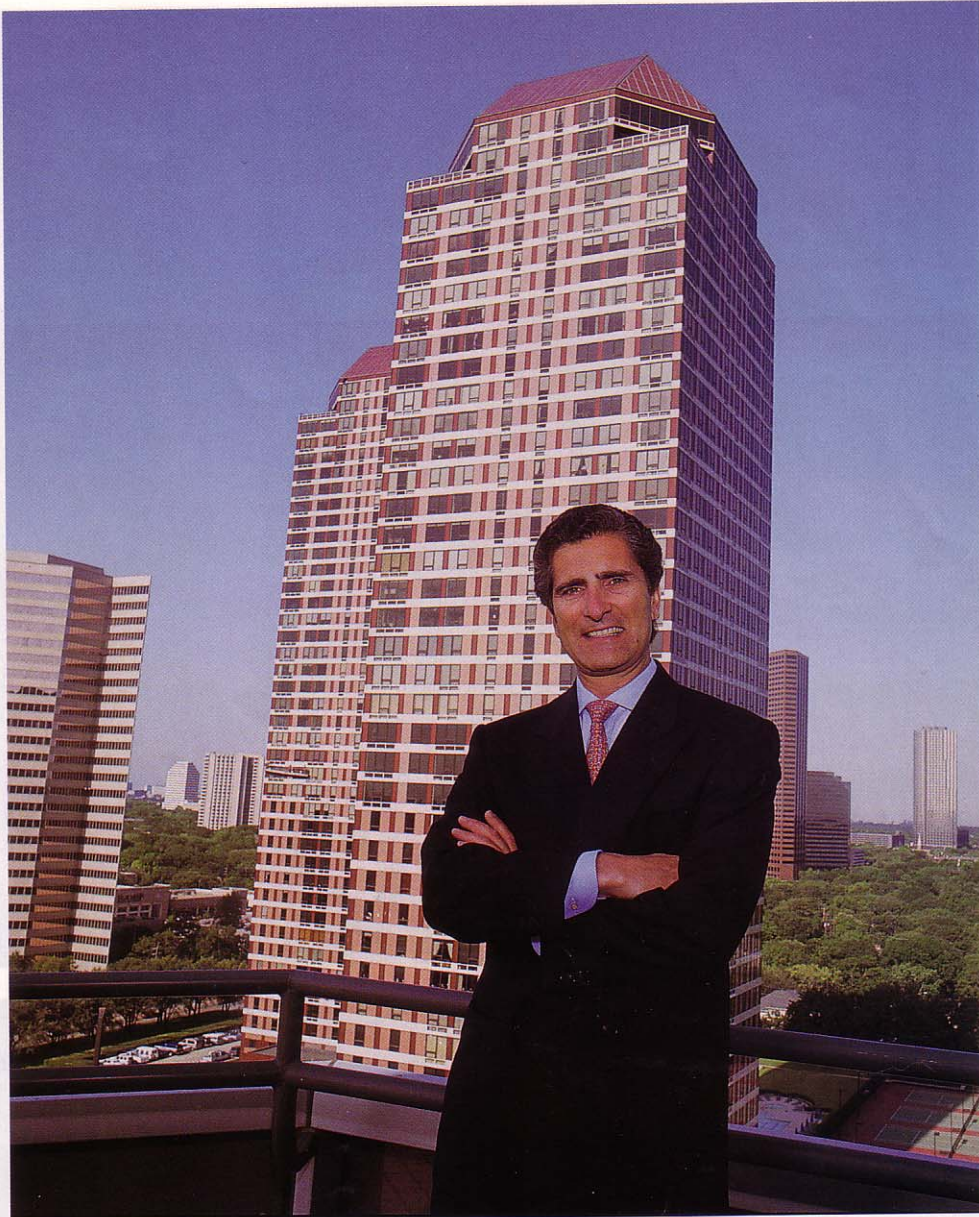
From the foyer's barrel-vaulted, golden ceiling to the roomy kitchen with its Provence French tiles and custom hooded island, it is Wellsian to the core—cheerful, suave, livable and elegant, all at once.

Now, three years after taking possession, they're still delighted with their new home, with their designer/magician, and delighted there are no longer any second thoughts and no concerns about moving—from either Castle.

### 'They Have Our Name on Them'

Four-Leaf Towers apparently has a salutary effect on its residents. You learn from talking to several that it's a combination of luxury, charm and smooth, old-fashioned service. And it appears to make no difference whether your view is from a penthouse terrace, as is the Castle's, or the windows of a one-bedroom suite.

Service and quality seem to be essential to the buildings' owner, Interfin Corp. and



Your learn from talking to several that it's a combination of luxury, charm and smooth, old-fashioned service.

**Giorgio Borlenghi, founder/president of Interfin Corp., on the balcony of his corporate offices. In background are twin Four-Leaf Towers, his first development in Houston. Borlenghi recently broke ground on a new super-luxe high-rise, Villa d'Este.**

its founder/president, Giorgio Borlenghi. He underlines his belief with a quote from one of his personal heroes, late automotive genius Enzo Ferrari. "Mr. Ferrari used to say that although he made cars to sell, those cars had his name on them, so in a way they were still his, even after he sold them, and they had to be built to the best possible standards.

"That's the way we feel about our buildings; we build them with the highest quality pos-

sible and we want the residents to be happy because our name is on those buildings."

Stability is big among Houstonians who remember the upheavals of condominium life in the 80s. Several highrises were built at the pinnacle of the oil boom, as was Four-Leaf, opening in 1982. That year Houston's heart nearly stopped with the recession's numbing jolt. Of all the proud residential towers erected in that time, only Four-Leaf's twins survived under their original owner-



Birch cabinets in lamed oak finish by **Decorative Arts**, which also finished Wells-designed hood, sets light tone of kitchen. Chinese scone, circa 1900, one of a pair formerly owned by **Lauren Bacall**, feels at home with antique Chinese rug. "Paradisio" granite from India, wood floors by **Schenck**. Six neo-Gothic painted chairs are circa 1835. Scottish antique copper urn was won at first **CAM** auction in the 1950s.

Russian Beidermier style dining table in birch was made for room by **Wells**. Custom chairs are French in **Randolph & Hein** "Ikat Diamond" silk from **Walter Lee Culp**. Curtains are pleated silk "Venise" by 20th Century, from **David Sutherland**. Painting, "Barbarossa," by **Friedel Dzubas**, 1982. Chinese Famille Rose bowl is 19th century, from **John F. Kennedy** estate. All flowers shown by **Lyman Ratcliffe**.



ship, reports a real estate source.

Its staying power and ability to attract the affluent in large numbers helped give it an address as socially prominent as any ZIP code in Houston.

If the twin towers appear to possess a worldly quality, it may be because more of the international set is drawn to them than to any other Houston address, or at least **Borlenghi** believes this to be the case. The reason is location, he says: "For centuries Europeans have lived in multi-purpose neighborhoods in their cities, and Uptown (the Post Oak-Galleria area) has become that kind of neighborhood." **Four-Leaf's** refined amenities should also be factored in as magnets for the globetrotters, he adds.

#### Time for Something Special

While he'd been busy on other projects since the mid-80s, **Borlenghi** watched the market grow and change



French mirror, 8-ft., 6-in. tall, is said to have exchanged hands in a card game between two English earls in 1700s. From Christopher Hodson, Ltd., London. Louis XVI style fauteuils are 19th century. Walls are custom strie-glazed.



**Master suite looks out from 40th floor's 180-degree panorama. Curtains in d.d. tillett silk. Coverlet in Schumacher's "Manor Ivy." Headboard from Designer Imports International. Custom faux painted demi-lune bedside tables. Empire commode at right, early 19th century. Antique Chinese table, foreground. Far door opens into bath suite.**

in its dynamics. No high-rise condominium had been built in Houston for 14 years. The time had come by the late 90s for an extraordinary residence tower; the best and most luxurious he could create. The forethought that went into its beginning goes back a long way.

"We've had 20 years since we moved here in 1978 to see what Houstonians really wanted in a high-rise residence," he says. "Before then we had a lot of experience building them all over Europe and in California, and that experience created Four-Leaf Towers." Now it was time for something completely new and uniquely Houston.

He would set a time for completion; what better date than the beginning of the new millennium—spring of 2000.

As plans for the tower jelled, Borlenghi positioned the building for exclusivity and

intimacy, allotting 100 units on 27 floors. Its size would also give it an ease of maintenance and service. He wanted the new tower to reflect a sense of tradition, of being part of the landscape, so he would sheath it in a traditional surface—limestone. "The day after it opens I want people to feel it has been there 15 years," he says.

#### **What's in A Name?**

He wanted to accurately reflect the tower's qualities in its new name. Envisioning the city's most exclusive high-rise, it had to mean something special to him. The search ended at one of his favorite spots on earth: Villa d'Este, a legendary country house and gardens on the Tivoli hill, east of Rome. Built by Ippolito Este, son of Lucrezia Borgia, since 1550 this national treasure has been praised by such giants as Montaigne, the

essayist, Chateaubriand, the author, and Fragonard, the painter. Franz Liszt lived there in the 1870s and immortalized it in his music. For nearly 450 years Villa d'Este has been acknowledged as one of the world's most beautiful places.

#### **Essential Luxuries, Essential Space**

Borlenghi's check list of requirements was voluminous. He included all the first quality production values and amenities inherent in Four-Leaf, then added the technological advances developed since its construction.

"We know Houstonians don't want to compromise when they change their lifestyle and for most of them that means moving from a large house," he says. "They want convenience, the things they had at home, like a large kitchen with an island, with the family room adjoining, because



people often gather in that area.

"They like large bedrooms with spacious closets, baths as much as possible like those at home, with windows. They want oversized living rooms and dining rooms so they can bring with them the family dining table they're accustomed to. They like high ceilings for a sense of spaciousness."

They also like their cars secure, which means building another trademark underground garage, one that would hold 280 vehicles.

He was certain enough of his mission in the project to plan all of the units personally. In even the smallest, a one-bedroom, space is generous. Its foyer, for example, is 8 ft., 6 in. by 18 ft. All the other rooms are similarly scaled to fit an expansive 2,390 sq. ft. Two-bedroom units will contain 3,360 sq. ft. Three bedrooms expand to 4,035 sq. ft. Penthouses range from 5,063 to 5,569 sq. ft.

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Villa d'Este has been  
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Villa d'Este's interior architecture considers the active social life that is routine for many affluent couples. In the two- and three-bedroom units, for example, an expansive space 66 feet long spreads unbroken through the living, dining and den areas to

allow for large gatherings.

Marble baths, granite counters and islands with fine wooden cabinets and high-grade appliances in big kitchens, oak-floored entries, balconies in all units, fully operable windows—the list is prodigious. The quality, seen and unseen, stuns you.

#### In The Middle of A Park

Villa d'Este will set on six-and-a-half acres, complete with tennis courts, pool, whirlpool and fitness room. It will be adjacent to a 13-acre Interfin retail development called Uptown Park, just north of San Felipe, between Post Oak Lane and the West Loop. When completed the park will be sprinkled with 20 high-end shops styled like a European village. Its designers, Brand & Allen Architects, have produced centers in Beverly Hills' Rodeo Drive.

Pre-construction tabs for the residential units span \$470,000 to \$1.4 million. However, you're out of luck if you're thinking penthouse—all four are sold. Penthouse buyers are already tweaking their plans with custom work, which will run costs considerably beyond the initial outlay. As of our deadline 27 units have been sold and 14 are in negotiations, exclusive agents Morgan-Personette advised. If you're interested, get cracking; ground was broken in early May.

Borlenghi is delighted by owners' creativity, such as joining two one-bedroom units together, one on top of the other, to be connected by spiral stairs and possibly an elevator for a total unit space of around 4,800 sq. ft. "The idea is to have



**Digitally generated view of Villa d'Este, super-luxury 27-story condominium scheduled to open in the spring of 2000. Construction began last month. This latest Interfin tower on 6.5 acres will adjoin 13-acre Uptown Park retail center off Loop 610 West near San Felipe. Park will enclose European village-styled luxury shopping area.**



**Spacious wood-paneled kitchens will have granite countertops and be equipped with the most modern appliances, including a warming drawer. They will feature a large central island, walk-in pantry, a silver closet, and will open into a cozy family room.**

entertainment areas on one floor and bedrooms on the other," he points out, "like a townhouse."

#### **Carve Your Own Space**

So far, two such versions have already been purchased, he noted, adding that architects are also doing studies on joining two units horizontally for other potential buyers.

"We will see people wanting even more space," he says, leaving open the idea of duplexing a stack of three-bedroom units for more than 8,000 sq. ft. Or, how about an entire floor at something more than 13,000 sq. ft.?

"While there will always be a certain option for remodeling existing units, it could never be as extensive or as feasible as it will be in the planning stages," he says. At some early point in construction, you can bet

prices will head north.

Zeigler Cooper Architects planned the striking limestone exterior and completed the interior architecture. Scott Zeigler is principal design architect, whom Interfin's boss applauds for his work. Project consultants are CBM Engineers and CHPA for structural and mechanical design-planning, respectively.

#### **Trophies in Europe**

Watch your language around Borlenghi; he is fluent in five of them. He also has a knack for organization and management that is family based; several generations of Borlenghis preceded him in building and development. A longtime force in Italy, their focus has also included France, California and South America, from projects as varied as shopping centers to the super posh La Reserve residence tower in Monte Carlo.

Before arriving in America Borlenghi's largest single effort was as project manager for engineering and construction of Sporting Mirasole, a mega-million-sq.-ft. multi-use development in Milan, currently home for 5,000 people. IBM's computer center in Rome is also his project. He holds a master's degree in structural engineering from Poly-

technic University of Milan.

For his business, civic and charity activity, both in his native land and abroad, he was named a Knight of the Republic of Italy in 1991 by President Francesco Cossiga.

#### **Four-Leaf Clovers Are Lucky**

Borlenghi stunned the local luxury real estate market in 1980 by announcing Four-Leaf Towers' 400-unit development at the edge of exclusive Tanglewood. Not just another high-rise on a skinny lot, here was a new concept, at least regionally, for condominiums. He set his towers in a 9.5-acre greenscape of molded berms and smooth lawns, filled with costly details—5.5-acres of underground parking and 15-inch-thick soundproof walls between units. Like developer Gerald Hines, Borlenghi immediately opted for landmarks—great designs by major architects. He hired the famed dean of Yale's school of architecture, Cesar Pelli.

A year after Four-Leaf Towers opened, Pelli-designed Four Oaks Place, a quartet of office towers totaling 1.76 million sq. ft., was completed across the street in an 18-acre park.

In 1989 Interfin sold a majority interest in Four Oaks Place to a Japan/U.S. consor-

tium for \$275 million, retaining a minority share and property management services. It then acquired the 727-acre Williamsburg site in West Houston for business, retail, distribution and multi-family residential development.

An exclusive, gated, residential enclave called Holly Springs Circle has been completed near Four-Leaf and the company has

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built significant houses in other high-end neighborhoods. The future for Houston looks bright, Borlenghi says, and he expects to see it get much brighter.

**The Baby Boomer Factor**

Basing predictions on in-depth demographic studies and his own market savvy he believes Houston is set for a huge boom in population and high-rise living. "The baby boomer generation is different from the previous one. It wants more mobility; a place here, perhaps a place in Colorado for a weekend. We can even see that movement in the travel explosion.

"High-rise lifestyle fits baby boomers perfectly; they can shut the door, leave, and everything is taken care of, and that's what they want. This generational aspect of lifestyle makes me believe high-rise living will explode. It's getting more international, too.

"Numerous national surveys predict that by 2010 Houston's population will be in the ten million range. The city will grow exponentially as people discover the convenience of living near work, in the inner city, not fighting traffic, and the critical aspects of security. It's coming." ♦

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