

## Tiny condos not for the small-minded

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Small is the new big.

When Supervisor [Scott Wiener](#) proposed legislation that would allow for new construction of rental units with as little as 150 square feet of living space, there were hoots of derision.

That's no more than a parking space, critics said.

Well that's just silly. It is at least two

parking spaces.

But the concept isn't so far-fetched. In 2008, an innovative condo building called Cubix opened on Harrison Street, and although the hoots were just as loud - and it experienced some rocky financial times - it is now fully occupied with tenants who say they are neither dissatisfied nor claustrophobic.

"In December I will be here four years, and I love it," said [Hugo Gonzalez](#), whose unit is 280 square feet. "I really had to pare down my life, but I can say that everything in my place has meaning to me. It really does feel like home."

That wasn't the prediction when architect and developer [George Hauser](#) set out to create "a new living paradigm" with the 98-unit, eight-floor building. Critics looked at the less-than-300-square-foot floor plan, with the bathroom adjacent to the stove and prices as high as \$270,000, and laid into the place.

"Anyone paying these prices will immediately be dubbed a 'Cubix rube,'" said a commenter on [SocketSite](#), a local [real estate](#) blog.

"A lot of static came out of Yelp, the world of naysayers," Hauser said. "It was a personal affront to some people. They were reacting to the price per square foot. That wasn't the point. The idea was to offer people a space in the city at a low price point."

History is repeating itself with Wiener's proposal (for more details, see [Carolyn Said's](#) story on the front page). The concept is still market-driven. If people don't want to live in small, custom boxes, they don't have to buy or rent them. It's not like the people who move in don't know they are tiny.

Gonzalez says when visitors come over for the first time, he lets them in and then says, "Here's the kitchen, this is the family room, the bedroom, and over here is the bathroom." The joke, of course, is he hasn't moved a step. Everything is at arm's length.

Granted, Hauser went bust on Cubix and prices were slashed. But he wasn't the only one who went underwater in the summer of 2008.

"I couldn't have done it at a worse time," he says. "It was right in the middle of the financial crisis. I had to give it back to my lender and declare bankruptcy."

There's more to the story. [Tara Forkum](#), who works near the building, was intrigued with the spaces. She qualified for a financial aid program from the city and became one of the first buyers with a 280-square foot unit for \$274,000.

In the wake of the financial problems, prices dropped to the \$220,000s, but in the nearly four years she's lived here she says they've climbed back up to close to where they started. Besides, she says, she didn't just buy a unit, she found a community.

"We do outings," she said. "We went bowling recently, and we have barbecues. We all look out for each other so it's a pretty safe building."

At one of those outings, over a few drinks on the roof deck, she met [Wayne Pantanian](#), another new resident.

"It was love at first sight," says Pantanian.

"I heard violins," says Forkum.

Eight months ago the two were married. And they moved into Tara's home.

That's right, it turned out they were looking for love in all the small places.

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