

Business

Section 3

Chicago Tribune Thursday, April 29, 1993

For a dozen years or so, Hefner padded around the mansion in silk pajamas embodying sexual liberation—until he moved the party to Los Angeles in the mid-1970s.



Gamble Rogers for society doctor George Snow Isham, it was built for about \$100,000 in an ornate French style with a mansard roof and dormers lavishly decorated with urns and scrolls.

Theodore Roosevelt and Adm. Robert Peary were early guests, and the ballroom was lent for the meetings of Miss Hinman's dancing class, where aristocratic pre-debutantes learned to waltz.

Like a few other Near North palaces, the building was subdivided and fell into decline after World War I and during the Depression. A parking lot tycoon bought and restored it in the 1940s, and a later owner sold it to Playboy for \$400,000 in 1959.

For a dozen years or so, Hefner padded around in silk pajamas embodying sexual liberation, bunnies rusted the ghosts of the pre-debs, and the likes of Norman Mailer and Sammy Davis Jr. ordered room service in the opulent Red Room from the 24-hour kitchen.

But Hefner moved the party to Los Angeles in the mid-1970s, and the mansion was donated by Playboy for charitable fund-raising events until the School of the Art Institute got it in 1984.

Given the august name of Hefner Hall—the plaque is still there—it was used for art student dormitories until 1990, when the school, unable to afford the upkeep, closed it and put it on the block.

Abrams said developers have heretofore been deterred by the challenge of creating enough units at the right price to make the deal worthwhile, particularly considering the need for parking space.

His plan is to excavate a ramp from the rear of the building into what is now the basement, which would be turned into 14 parking stalls, or two per unit. A front driveway now used for parking will become a garden.

The smallest unit will be about 3,500 square feet, and all the condos will have broad outdoor terraces, Abrams said.

Abrams is converting and renovating another historic Gold Coast property, the 1910-vintage Chandler Apartments at 33 E. Bellevue Pl. He said the market response to the high-end condos at that building, which have been sold out, convinced him that buyers could be found for Playboy Mansion units.

Early neighborhood reaction to the project appeared positive. Ana Kenesick, president of the North Dearborn Association, which met with Abrams Tuesday night, said the plans for the underground garage and the garden in place of the present front driveway sounded particularly attractive.



The front driveway at the former Playboy mansion, 1340 N. State Pkwy., is to be turned into a garden.

Playboy's former posh playland going condo

By J. Linn Allen

The curvaceous indoor pool with the little tropical islands and a hidden grotto, where bunnies cavorted and Hugh Hefner and his guests watched from an underwater bar—or from a hidden trapdoor above—will be gone.

But the 60-foot-long oak-paneled ballroom with its sumptuously carved arches, beams and columns will be restored to its original glory.

In other words, 1960s tacky will give way to turn-of-the-century elegance in the proposed conversion of the former Playboy Mansion at 1340 N. State Pkwy. to condominiums by LR Development, a North Side real estate firm specializing in renovations of classic buildings.

LR president Bruce Abrams said Wednesday that he has a contract to acquire the historic mansion from the School of the Art Institute, which got the building virtually free from Playboy Enterprises Inc. in 1984.

Closing will be within 90 days, Abrams said.

Abrams indicated he has agreed to pay something less than the asking price of \$2.7 million for the 70-plus-room, 1903-vintage mansion, which has been for sale for about three years.

He said he plans \$3 million more in renovations to turn the property into seven or eight condos ranging in price from \$675,000 to \$2.1 million.

The 7,490-square-foot, \$2.1 million unit will occupy the entire second floor of the mansion, including the ballroom and what used to be Hugh Hefner's bedroom suite, which contains an original fireplace adorned with carved marble lion heads.

The buyer of that condo will be "somebody who likes to entertain," Abrams suggested.

Entertaining of one sort or another has always been a hallmark of the mansion. Designed by socially prominent architect James