

GOSSIP

THE CLOSER

Excuse our indulgence this week as one gossip item deserves the entire column

You heard it here first: On March 2, Jason Sheffell wrote "Etrier hotelier Andre Balazs (below) is light years head of his time as a real estate developer creating high-design living environments for sophisticated set or he's lost his marbles."

Three months later, we think Balazs has found his marbles. William Beaver, the martini-swiggling cartoon character created to market the controversial Wall Street luxury condo William Beaver House has had to sober up.

Also censored are the artist renderings of the interior's draped with semi-naked bodies. The building's Web site has already dropped the scantily clad sex-dripping human caricatures.

New marketing materials focusing on a more elegant building are allegedly under production. Some structural changes to the building are also in the works. The glass-bottomed hot tub positioned above the lobby will be blocked by a huge chandelier, and kitchen and bathroom finishes are being improved. Real estate sources close to the Daily

News tell us that over the weekend, Balazs replaced his U.S. sales and marketing team at the Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group with Shaun Osher's Core Group for U.S. sales. Balazs maintains Prudigy International as his international brokerage firm selling to the market overseas, where the majority of sales have come from. Osher's Core Group is known for a no-nonsense, no-frills approach to selling buildings.

According to sources, Balazs' 320-unit building is the only high-end condo project in the city not selling in this boom market. It's also the only building in the neighborhood not selling.

Since Balazs opened the William Beaver sales office with a wild pole-dancing party last November, only 30% of the building is under contract. Just down the street, be@william reports being 70% sold of the 113 condos from sales beginning April 25. Around the corner from the Beaver House, 75 Wall St. reports 20% of 349 condos sold in just two short weeks.

Ironically, be@william and 75 Wall are sold and marketed by the Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group, let go by Balazs.

Price may be the issue. The William Beaver House is priced at approximately \$1,600 per square foot while be@william sells for \$875 per



What a difference three months of no sales makes. Left, the now sober renditions of the William Beaver condo building in comparison to the original sex-dripping version, below.



square foot and 75 Wall for reportedly \$1,300 per square foot.

Brokers familiar with the downtown arena aren't surprised at the shift in the marketing plan. "This is a case where the developers are being educated by the marketplace and not the other way around," says Prudential Douglas Elliman broker Frances Katzen.

"These are savvy, smart, New York buyers. You need more than just sex to sell to this market."

One thing Balazs did get right is that he

wasn't far off in his prediction that Wall Street would become the next SoHo. Brokers and developers report families, singles, young couples and internationals are buying up apartments in the other high-profile buildings in this bustling neighborhood.

Good luck, William Beaver. At least you had a heck of an opening party. The plastic leather catsuits will long be remembered.

Andre Balazs' PR firm declined to comment. It's likely, though, that the cartoon beaver will remain gainfully employed.