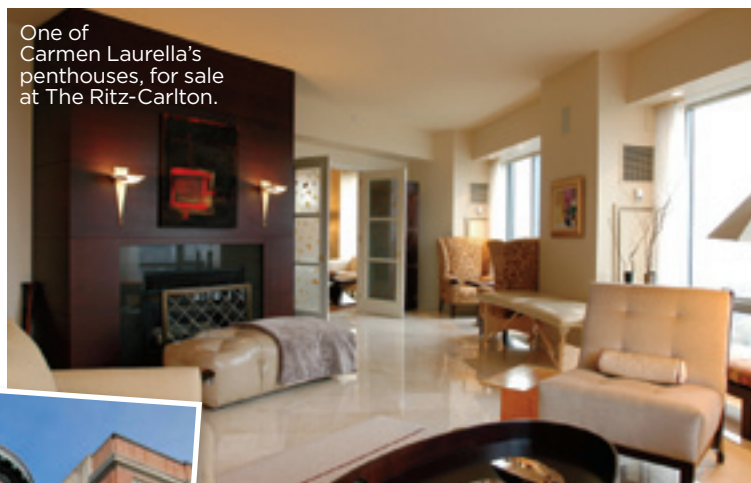


Carmela Laurella and Sherry Walker



One of Carmela Laurella's penthouses, for sale at The Ritz-Carlton.



One of Walker's Beacon Hill listings, 101 Mount Vernon Street.

icing on the cake

TOP BROKERS DISCUSS WHICH PENTHOUSES IN BOSTON LIVE UP TO THE VIEW. BY BROOKE FOSTER

There's a scene in the 1990 hit film *Pretty Woman* when Richard Gere's character reveals that he's scared to join actress Julia Roberts's character on the terrace of his penthouse. When she asks why he stays in a penthouse if he's afraid of heights, Gere's response is simple: "It's the best."

No doubt penthouses have cachet, and the higher the unit, the higher the price: The typical Boston penthouse costs about 20 to 30 percent more per square foot than condos on other floors of the same building. But penthouses can be hard to come by; there are five on the market in the Waterfront, 10 in Back Bay, and eight in Beacon Hill. They often have features possible only in the units at the top of a building: soaring ceilings, 360-degree views, and sprawling gardens. We asked Sherry Walker, a broker with William Raveis Real Estate, Mortgage, & Insurance, and Carmela Laurella, president of CL Waterfront Properties, to tell us what makes Boston penthouses desirable, which buildings have the best views, and the perks of living at the top.

What makes a penthouse special?

Sherry Walker: You need a fabulous view and lots of outdoor space, whether it's a garden or a terrace. There's a penthouse at 221 Columbus in Back Bay on the market for \$7.2 million—it has 3,500 square feet and is surrounded by garden terraces.

Carmela Laurella: Penthouses are for people looking for something

special, like floor-to-ceiling glass, fireplaces (which are often only at the penthouse level), large decks, and sometimes additional parking. Most important, penthouses have the best views.

So which units offer the best panoramas?

CL: The best waterfront views are at Burroughs Wharf and Commercial Wharf. In other parts of the city, The Ritz-Carlton, the W, the Mandarin Oriental—they're all one-of-a-kind, with astounding views. Penthouse 12 at Burroughs Wharf, which sold in 2007, has surround views from every room, 20-foot ceilings in the master bedroom, and 360-degree views of the harbor and city.

Can every top-floor unit be considered a penthouse?

SW: Yes, but there's a big distinction between a penthouse in a newer luxury building at the Waterfront and penthouses in the South End, which tend to be atop five-story brownstones. The historic building may be a floor-through or a walk-up; it may also be smaller—700 to 1,400 square feet.

CL: A small building in the North End may have a top floor that could be called a penthouse, but does not have additional features to add to the true definition of a penthouse. They need to work to make that space a true penthouse. We sold a 3,500-square-foot penthouse at 500 Commercial Street for \$3.6 million in 2008. It had a private elevator, two balconies, a private roof deck, and views of the harbor looking into the Charlestown Navy Yard.

Which buildings have the best penthouses in the city?

SW: The Mandarin Oriental is spectacular—it's beautifully constructed, and you can see the river from most units. The penthouses were built as shells, and people could customize them, so they're really well done.

CL: The Mariner was converted in 1984, and the upper floors are two penthouse levels, with unbelievable wraparound terraces that were structured around the original façade. At Rows Wharf, my client at Penthouse 7 raised the ceiling of his living room and built out an extra 400 square feet of storage space. Those are things you can do only at the penthouse level.

What was the most expensive penthouse to sell last year?

CL: At the Mandarin Oriental, a 6,111-square-foot penthouse sold for \$10.3 million. It had three fireplaces, terraces on the north and west sides, two deeded parking spaces, and the amenities of the Mandarin Oriental.

SW: A close second was Tom Brady's penthouse at 310 Beacon Street. It sold for \$9.2 million this past June. It has a pretty fabulous roof garden. *Carmela Laurella, CL Waterfront Properties, 113 Lewis Wharf, 617-624-9700; wpboston.com; Sherry Walker, William Raveis Real Estate, 18 Arlington St., 617-266-5200; raveis.com* **BC**