



MARK GORMUS/TIMES-DISPATCH

A former Catholic school in Church Hill is now a condo complex. The units at St. Patrick's Place are selling for \$200,000 to \$430,000.

Old school is in

Couches and televisions replace rulers and desks at defunct parochial school

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Add one more to the growing list of Richmond buildings converted from their original function to meet Richmond's increasingly hip housing tastes.

St. Patrick's Place, a former Catholic school constructed in 1914 at 2600 E. Grace St., is now a condo complex. Its 15 condominiums, ranging from 826 to 1,960 square feet, are on the market for \$200,000 to \$430,000.

Instead of pulling pigtails and smashing gum to the underside of wooden chairs, the building's new tenants are more likely to throw dinner parties and chat with their friends about how the Church Hill neighborhood is really coming around.

St. Patrick's Place is actually two buildings:

the former schoolhouse at East Grace and 26th Street, and a former convent behind it.

Along with 9-foot windows that once illuminated arithmetic workbooks, 21-foot ceilings give the pricier units an airy feel. Some units come with the original built-in sliding chalkboards.



Blakey

Most of the condos feature freshly stained moldings and buffed hardwood floors. The hallway in the former schoolhouse is 9 feet across with a wide staircase and banister at each end.

Laurie C. Blakey, a Remax real-estate agent in charge of selling the condos, says four contracts are pending. The condos officially went on the market in late June.

Jill Marklin, 24, an accountant, said she wants to live in a condo because she doesn't like yard work. She made an offer on a two-bedroom unit in the former convent. Marklin previously lived in the Fan District and the West End.

"I'm not a fixer-upper," she said. "There are

all-new appliances, and I won't have to worry that the dishwasher is going to break."

The Catholic Diocese of Richmond closed the coed school in June 2004 after years of declining enrollment.

It sold the buildings for \$825,000 in December to Stanley Shield LLC, a Richmond developer that specializes in renovating older buildings. Stanley Shield turned the Pohlig Box Factory at 25th and East Franklin into apartments.

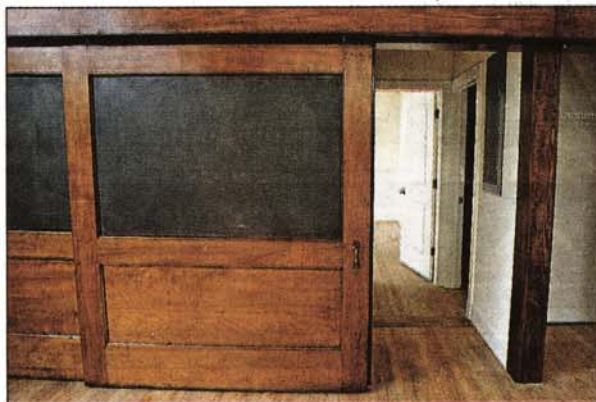
The cost for this renovation, designed by Commonwealth Architects, was \$2.8 million.

"We knew we could do it," said George Stanley, partner of the development company that bears his name. "We knew the highest and best use was residential . . . that it was not working economically as a school."

Condo fees at St. Patrick Place range from \$150 to \$230 per month. Each condo comes with one parking spot in the former playground.

So far, no St. Patrick alumnus has shown interest in living where they went to school; that might be a little too weird.

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Chalkboards (left) were retained as part of the design in some units. The city can be seen in the distance (right) from a second-floor window.