

# High-end housing finds rental-market niche

By **Christian Toto**  
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Tony Perri can afford to buy a high-priced, high-comfort home in Denver. He simply chose not to.

Perri recently signed a lease at The Seasons of Cherry Creek, a new luxury apartment complex within walking distance of one of Denver's premier shopping districts. He gets plenty of perks from the deal, plus he isn't tied to a hefty mortgage and won't be at the whim of a roller-coaster housing market.

And Perri, 51, isn't alone in his thinking. Other area residents eager to enjoy high-end flourishes are considering the rental market as a viable alternative to home buying. They can live in style, have access to Denver's urban areas and not have to worry about long-term financial commitments.

Perri, an adjunct professor of broadcast journalism at the University of Colorado and a TV/film producer and director, was attracted to the wealth of amenities in the building, from environmentally friendly living quarters to a stunning view of the city. He also liked the spontaneity associated with a rental property.

"I wasn't planning on renting," he said. But when he spotted the newly opened building in Cherry Creek, he ended up signing a lease later that day.

Mike Zoellner, chief executive of Red-Peak Properties, which operates The Seasons, said today's homebuyers are rethinking the American Dream concept. Residents who opt for The Seasons aren't bemoaning the lack of yard

space — or the time needed to tend to it.

"They want someone else to take care of everything," Zoellner said. "They don't want to be tied down."

Monthly lease rates at The Seasons range from \$815 for a studio to \$3,600 for a new three-bedroom apartment.

Patrick Chomyn, managing broker for [4rentdenver.com](http://4rentdenver.com), has seen a strong demand for high-end rentals in recent months. But expensive homes are also available at "screaming bargains," he said, which is curbing demand for high-price rentals.

Chomyn does note a change in the marketplace involving homeowners who can't sell their high-end properties. They're renting them instead, giving affluent renters a greater selection from which to choose.

The high-end rental market can be ideal for people coming to Denver for a short stay, he said, like people transferred to the area by their businesses who don't want to get locked into a purchase.

That wasn't necessarily the case before the housing market flattened.

"In the market three to five years ago, they said, 'Let's buy, because (prices are) going to go up,'" he said.

Home rentals across the board in Denver are flourishing, from modest accommodations to the high-end housing like The Seasons offers, said Gordon Von Stroh, a professor in the University of Denver's Daniels College of Business who studies apartment vacancy rates.

But the high-end rental market has a built-in cap that ensures it won't keep climbing, Von Stroh said.



On a clear day, Tony Perri can see Pikes Peak from his apartment balcony at The Seasons of Cherry Creek. He could have bought a house but chose instead to rent at the luxury complex. *John Leyba, The Denver Post*

"There's limited demand for that at the high end. Only a given number of people (are) at that income level that can afford high-end units," he said.

Lisa Todd, broker/owner of Todd Realty Group, said people remain jittery about the economy and the housing market's ability to recover. That, Todd said, can only help spark high-end rentals.

She said the trend also reflects new Denver residents who have trouble selling their old homes in cities hard hit by housing market woes, such as Phoenix.

Todd said many area residents still find high-end rentals "a hard pill to swallow. ... They'd much rather feel like they have ownership" for the big price tags required.

Perri agrees, saying he doesn't think Americans are undergoing a cultural shift regarding home ownership, even if his friends' ears "perked up" when he told them about The Seasons.

"I do think more people are seeing the benefits of renting and not having to go through the mortgage process," he said. "That was a big factor for me."