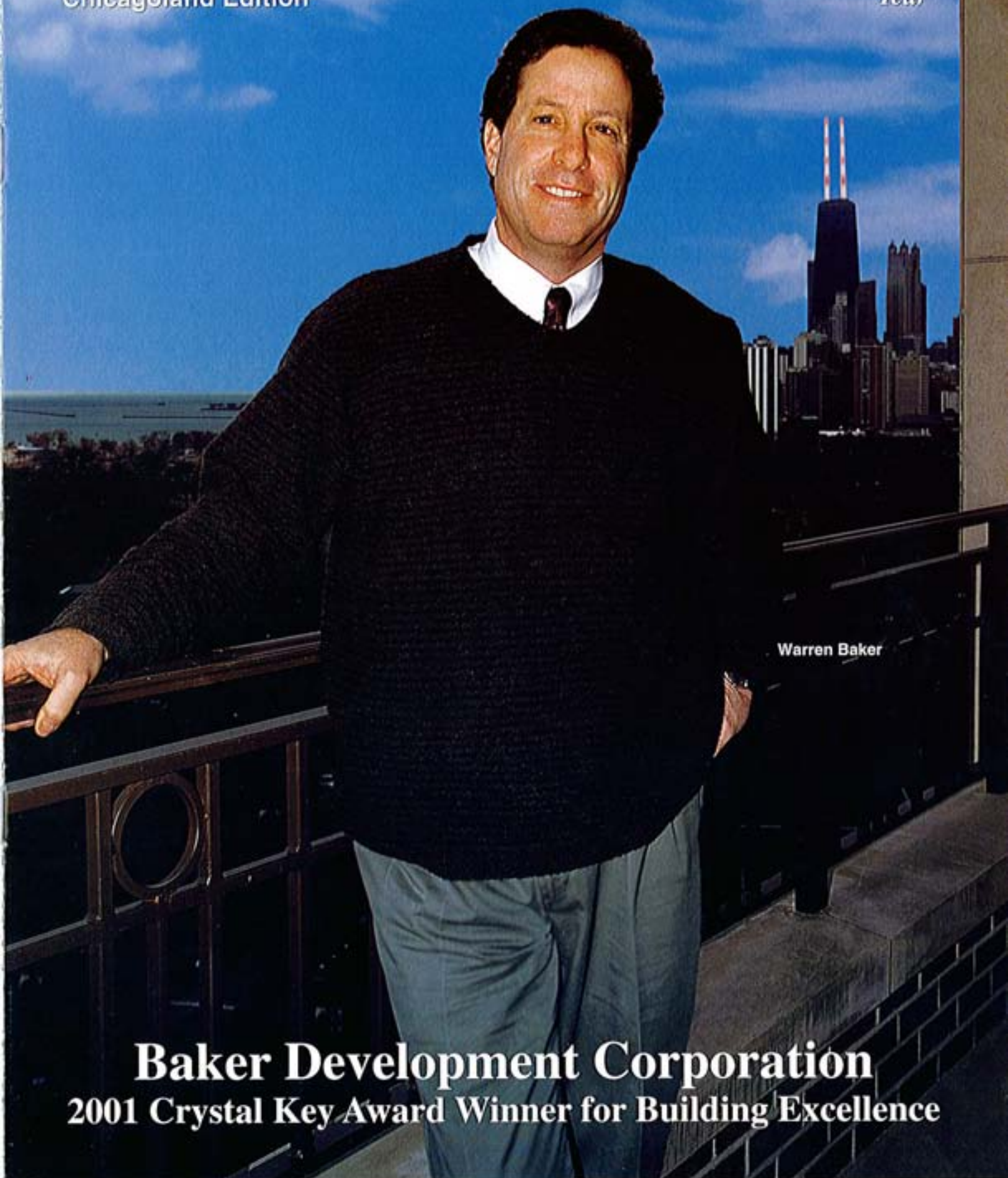


Builder/Architect

Chicagoland Edition

Our
64th
Year



Warren Baker

Baker Development Corporation
2001 Crystal Key Award Winner for Building Excellence

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By Heidi Denison Huett

The scenarios are worlds apart, but closely related. The guy, who as a young kid built bicycles using bike parts picked out of garbage cans, and as a teenager fixed everyone's car, has grown up and won the prestigious 2001 Crystal Key Award for his stunning condominium building that is one of the most exclusive residential addresses in the city.

Warren Baker, President of Baker Development Corporation, earned the distinguished honor for the spectacular development at 2120 North Lincoln Park West. Although he's risen to the top of his game, Baker prides himself on still being a "gear head" at heart.

"The aptitude for figuring things out and putting things together was cultivated very early on," says the determined Baker. "I've always been good with my hands. I developed this ability

when I was very young and it has been in my blood ever since."

Baker recounts the beginnings of his career as a logical progression. "Growing up, we lived across the street from an orphanage in Chicago. The kids in the orphanage stole my first new two-wheel bike. My dad couldn't afford to buy me another bike, so I remember finding parts of bikes that were being thrown away, and dad helped me build another bike. My bike kept getting stolen so I kept having to find parts to build new ones," he recalls with a smile.

Putting bikes together as a five-year-old gave rise to working on mini-bikes, to taking formal auto mechanics courses and to having a half a dozen cars at a time lined up in front of his parent's house waiting for his teenage hands to fix them.

College and graduate school brought finance and MBA degrees, white shirts and clean hands. Then, he quickly landed a job with International Harvester in their Construction Equipment Division. "I wanted to work for a company where I could apply my mechanical expertise," says the Evanston, IL, native. "It was there that I was exposed to heavy construction equipment and the fundamentals of construction. It was where my interest in the field was first piqued."

Following Baker's time with International Harvester, he began to apply his wide array of abilities to the investment world, which came to include several real estate holdings. All the pieces were then in place for a unique approach to real estate development. In 1985, he purchased and began renovating older residential buildings, con-

This 6,000 square foot residence spans two floors at 2120 North Lincoln Park West. Every floor of the spectacular building has two terraces facing east. Shown here, the terraces are on either side of this refined living room. The cut limestone fireplace mantle is the centerpiece of the room. Photography © Curtis Ritchie/Tigerhill Studio.





The intricate coffered ceiling and the herringbone floor with three species of wood used in the inlay design complement each other in this exquisite dining room. Photography © Curtis Ritchie/Tigerhill Studio.

verting some of them to condominiums. Soon he took on new construction projects as well.

Baker's spectrum of projects has included new and renovated single-family homes, townhouses, high-rise condominiums, office developments, commercial developments, and conversions of all types throughout the greater Chicago area.

Today, with a company of just eight employees, he's done just about everything a development company can do, which is one reason for his success. Last year, Baker Development boasted revenues of \$20 million, which is especially laudatory considering that he chooses to undertake only one to two development projects per year. "It's the old adage of quality versus quantity," he explains. "As boutique developers, we choose to do only a few high quality developments at a time. We prefer high profile projects that require us to micromanage the process. We do them very well. But diversification and adaptability are paramount," he says. "You have to read the proverbial handwriting on the wall, trust your intuition,

adjust and adapt."

For the last 18 months, Baker has avoided condominium development. "Demand for land and construction services kept driving pricing to unprecedented levels while sales demand was being driven artificially by investor speculators," he adds. Instead, Baker has been focusing on acquiring annuity driven properties.

Another area on which Baker has been focusing is providing consulting services to other development companies and to lenders. His talented staff includes architect/project managers, construction estimators and field personnel. The staff is experienced, forward thinking, and combines hands-on real estate development expertise with knowledge of the nuts and bolts of construction, including value engineering and design efficiency. This expertise can reduce project costs by several points, which is especially important during this challenging economic time. Baker is currently providing consulting services to several other developers launching mid-rise and high-rise residential projects as well as commer-

cial developments.

In addition, Baker provides residential design-build contracting services for the upper bracket market. "We have the knowledge and the talent to deliver a very high end product. We especially like the challenge of renovation, where you really have to be on your toes. There are very few contractors capable of retrofitting a 100-year-old building to our level of excellence. When we renovate a home, an apartment, or a loft building, our goal is to raise the bar and create a level of perfection whereby the product looks brand new and the compromises inherent in the old are removed or designed away," he says.

With all the different types of projects that Baker undertakes, some common themes quickly emerge: quality, passion and integrity. "We pride ourselves in doing the right thing," he says with a smile. "We set high expectations for our customers and ourselves and work hard to exceed them. Completing the project, including a punchlist, can be time consuming and costly if not properly executed. We succeed because we understand the



Each home in the 2120 building is totally unique and highly customized. This kitchen and adjoining family room shown to the right, open to the 2,000 square foot back terrace of this residence resulting in a very open and flowing floor plan. Photography © Curtis Ritchie/Tigerhill Studio.

The rooftop terrace actually spans the width of the building and wraps around the southern end, creating additional space for outdoor enjoyment. Located within the walls are enormous planters where large trees and shrubs have been planted. An integral irrigation system was installed under the unique paving system so that proper drainage takes place and watering the plants and trees is automatic. Photography © Curtis Ritchie/Tigerhill Studio.



complexity of construction and we bring out the best in the designers and contractors so that they meet or exceed our high expectations," he says.

Baker knows what he's talking about.

Baker's 2120 Lincoln Park West condominium exudes quality and architectural style, which explains its tremendous appeal. These characteristics are no accident. The Baker team devoted a great deal of time to planning and design. They were inspired by the turn of the century architecture for which Chicago is famous. "We wanted to evoke the heritage of the great architects who rebuilt the landscape of Chicago following the Great Chicago Fire in 1871," he says. "Daniel Burnham, Louis H. Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright and their counterparts were the fathers of the Chicago School of Architecture. It was their creativity and attention to detail that we wanted to recreate."

The 19-story building, after various floors were combined to create duplex units, is composed of just 11 residences. Each floor of the building has a 3,000 square foot floor plate. The spec-

tacular two-story penthouse affords the most astonishing space and the most breathtaking views in the city. Technological advances in reinforced concrete permitted Baker to create remarkably open floor plans, generous window proportions, and dramatic terracing. Significant investments in mechanical and acoustical engineering were integrated into the design to ensure that each homeowner enjoys comfort and privacy.

One of the most stunning aspects of 2120 North Lincoln Park West is just outside. The living spaces and two terraces on each floor of the building overlook Lincoln Park, one of America's most endearing urban preserves. The nearby gardens and zoo, the shoreline, and the expanse of Lake Michigan and city skyline promote a unique sense of fulfillment and well-being.

At 2120, Baker built the high-rise using many materials that are usually reserved for high-end single-family homes. Modular size brick, extensive use of cut limestone profiles, mahogany

millwork, and exterior bronze doors underscore the luxury of this highly customized building. While these elements are found throughout, each floor is totally unique. "We chose to sell almost every floor as raw space," says Baker. "Many residents chose us as the contractor for their interior build out and we worked with their architect and designer." While not willing to disclose pricing, Baker adds that the value of the residences at 2120 exceeds that of well-known addresses on East Lake Shore Drive and Michigan Avenue.

The building was a design challenge because its site is a mere 6,000 square feet. "Our challenge was to create very open, flowing floor plans while limiting the impact that the core, the superstructure, and the mechanical systems had on the floor plans," says Baker. "The completed wonder makes it apparent that everyone involved rose to the intellectual design challenge."

This up-front planning is one trait that sets Baker apart. "The discipline is to restrain your natural tendency to rush a project to market before the prover-

The kitchen, family room and rooftop terrace design is an ideal combination that can accommodate entertaining of nearly any size and style—formal to casual. Photography © Curtis Ritchie/Tigerhill Studio.





Above: The selections for this traditional kitchen include custom cabinetry, granite countertops with matching back splash, and top-of-the-line appliances. Photography © Curtis Ritchie/Tigerhill Studio.

Right: The level of customization throughout the building and the uniqueness of each residence is truly remarkable. In this unit, the homeowners chose a two-story design with the entry on the second level and master suite below. Straight ahead to the living room and from the dining room to its right, den to the left, is a magnificent view of Lake Michigan, Lincoln Park and the City of Chicago. Photography © Curtis Ritchie/Tigerhill Studio.





Above: Lincoln Park, Lake Michigan and the City of Chicago become part of each residence in the 2120 building. Photo by Howard N. Kaplan © 2001 HNK Architectural Photography, Inc.

Right: The classic design of the 2120 building can accommodate every taste in furnishings, from traditional to contemporary. Photo by Howard N. Kaplan © 2001 HNK Architectural Photography, Inc.

bial "I's" are dotted and "T's" are crossed. Expecting 100 percent completed construction drawings is unrealistic and virtually impossible. However, we want construction drawings that are as close to 100 percent as possible," he says. "To get close to 100 percent means being proficient in reading drawings and then challenging your architects, engineers and consultants to go the extra mile. This means the drawings are going to take longer to complete, which pushes out the bid process and construction start date. It takes discipline to slow the process down, but focusing on getting a good set of drawings up front means the project will go faster with fewer problems once construction begins." He adds that addi-





Above: The 2120 North Lincoln Park West condominium exudes quality and architectural style, which explains its tremendous appeal. The Baker Development team devoted a great deal of time to planning and design of the masterpiece. They were inspired by the turn of the century architecture for which Chicago is famous, Burnham, Sullivan and Wright. Photography © John Hill/Tigerhill Studio.



Left: Exterior bronze doors and intricate stone detail underscore the luxury of this Crystal Key Award winning building. Photography © Curtis Ritchie/Tigerhill Studio.

tional planning time spent early on will invariably yield a more efficient design, a shorter and smoother construction period and fewer change orders as well.

It's interesting to think that this person who now speaks of discipline, efficiency and style is the same one that began by scavenging old bikes together as a kid. "We pride ourselves in being "A to Z" developers," says Baker. "With most developers, marketing drives most of the decisions. That gets you from "A to B." We choose to be more technically driven when it comes to making our decisions. You have to be willing to spend a little more money but that makes getting from "B to Z" much easier. Emphasizing this part of the business really sets us apart." It's vastly apparent, however, that there are many, many aspects of this young developer that set him apart.

For more information about Baker Development Corporation call (773) 755-0600 or visit their Web site at www.bakerdevelopmentcorp.com.

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Architects and designers for the interiors of the residences shown in the photographs were:

Jerry W Kettman Interior Design, Chicago
 Lane Epstein, Baker Development Corporation, Chicago
 Doug Gillespie, Mayer Jeffers Gillespie Architects, Chicago
 Sally Margolis Designs, Deerfield, IL
 Marcel Freides/Architect Ltd., Chicago
 Andrea Grass Interiors, Chicago