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Work continues on historic apartment project

The century-old Canopic Building is getting a makeover.

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MUNCIE -- At the Roberts Hotel, work to transform the historic building into luxury apartments has been stalled for months and silence blankets the building.

But a few blocks northeast of the downtown Muncie landmark, the sound of construction permeates the air at the Canopic Building, where workers are busily renovating the century-old structure and readying it for occupation this fall and winter.

"It's coming along great," said developer Duane Miller of Flaherty & Collins in Indianapolis. "We're earmarked for an open house at the end of October or beginning of November. We'll look at units being open by that time."

The Roberts project -- once estimated at nearly \$10 million by Peter Dvorak, the Bloomington businessman who owns the former hotel -- has been stalled since spring. Dvorak said he's been unable to secure financing for the project and lawsuits have been filed over unpaid loans and bills.

The \$4 million Canopic project is on firm financial footing, Miller said, thanks in part to tax credits for preserving the historic nature of the building and ensuring that the completed 24 apartment units will be rented to people of various income levels.

Miller said he had not yet settled on a rent range.

"I had my financing all set up before I began," Miller said. "I held onto that building for almost two years. I took hits up front that I was able to fold into the deal."

Miller recently offered a look at progress on the building, located in the 200 block of East Jackson Street and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Architectural details

Progress on the Canopic Building -- which is actually two joined structures, the W.W. Shirk Building, which dates to 1898, and the Canopic, built in 1906 -- is coming in sections rather than floor-by-floor.

Units facing Jackson Street will likely be completed first, Miller said. That includes former retail storefronts-turned-apartments on the first floor and two floors of apartments above.

The former retail spaces -- four on the first floor -- will retain their outside characteristics, including picture windows and large glass doors, to preserve the historic integrity of the building. Inside, the first-floor apartments are outfitted with modern touches but preserve some historic elements, including 14-foot ceilings, noted Mike Stufflebeam of Flaherty & Collins.

Upstairs, many architectural details remain, including dark wood banisters on the stairways and fireplaces and wooden mantles and built-in cabinets. The apartments are long, running from the front to the back of the building. Skylights and light wells help bring sunlight into the building.

Behind the building is an area that had been an eyesore but will become a feature. Two floors of dilapidated balconies that overlooked a parking lot have been replaced with new steel structures. Small doors -- pass-throughs for grocery deliveries decades ago -- dot the walls along the balconies. The parking lot below is being replaced with a courtyard.

"It's a pretty cool building," Miller said.

'Sexy' name?

The Canopic building, a brick and limestone structure in the Italian Renaissance style, featured some of the most prestigious apartments in Muncie when it was new.

The building sat empty in recent years until Miller began working toward the renovation project. Miller oversaw the Millennium Place and Howard Square projects in Muncie.

Still to be determined is the final name for the building.

"I don't think we've given it an official name at all," he said. "Historic Muncie Apartments is not an interesting name. Canopic is not a sexy name."
