

## IN THE REGION/New Jersey

# New Style for 'a Classic Old Town'

By ANTOINETTE MARTIN

**J**AMES WARD says he is determined to make a "statement" with a lavish new condominium for people age 55 and over that is under construction in the midst of this affluent community's downtown.

That might sound like utter boastfulness were it not for the statement Mr. Ward has already made around the corner from the construction site, where he built a remarkable mansion for himself that now serves as a high-class catering hall.

The James Ward mansion stands at 169 East Broad Street, rising above the Ann Taylor clothing store, and appearing — a bit incongruously — as if it came straight out of New Orleans. Which, in fact, it did.

Mr. Ward, a self-taught architect who is passionate about French style, scavenged tall shutters and wrought-iron balconies from old homes in the Big Easy as keepsakes. When he built his mansion, he incorporated them into the facade.

Mr. Ward, a boyish-looking 29-year-old Irish immigrant, lived in the downtown mansion for three years before opening it for catered events. Now, as construction proceeds on the 35-unit condominium, called the Savannah, at 111 Prospect Street, he is using the mansion to advertise what condo buyers might expect.

As advertisements go, this one is singular. Not only is the exterior something special, at least for New Jersey, the interior is breathtaking — by any standards.

The 40-foot-high entrance hall on the second floor partly over the store is outfitted with a high-gloss parquet floor, ornate gilt mirrors and chandeliers, a fireplace with Beaux-Arts mantelpiece, and a vintage iron circular staircase.

Upstairs, off the wraparound hallway, is a garden room with marble fountains opening to a banquet room. There are also a French baroque bedroom copied from one at the Frick Museum, an elaborate altar in a chapel room with stained-glass windows of the Roman Catholic St. Patrick and St. Brigid, and a marbled-and-mirrored bathroom so spacious it could house a dinner party.

"I wanted to make a statement," said Mr. Ward, who is soft-spoken but also races Ferraris in his spare time. He wishes to say something again with the condominium project.

Mr. Ward brought in the Manhat-



Photographs by Richard Perry/The New York Times; rendering by Koiko Design L.L.C.



tan architect Domingo Diaz to create a European-style design for the exterior of the four-story building, featuring a French mansard roof, Juliet balconies and terraces, a brick-and-limestone facade with oversized windows surrounded by wide expanses of trim, fountains and other decorative features.

There are 23 different floor plans for the units at the Savannah (named after Mr. Ward's niece). They offer 1,620 to 4,300 square feet of living space on a single level; some also have wraparound rooftop terraces.

Units at the Savannah are priced at \$920,000 to \$2.4 million.

Fifteen were sold in the first two weeks of marketing, which started in late May, Mr. Ward said, and local

empty nesters snapped up the most expensive units first. The Savannah, he noted, is the first multifamily building to be built in affluent Westfield since the 1970s and is expected to be ready for occupancy next year.

It took eight years to secure all the necessary local approvals for the project, said Mr. Ward, who continues to live in town and who plans to set aside one of the units at the Savannah for his 79-year-old mother. Today, when a quarter of Westfield's well-to-do population has reached age 55 or over, is exactly the right moment to proceed with the project, Mr. Ward asserted.

All of the condos have two bedrooms and two and a half baths, and at least one of the bathrooms has a

### SINGULAR DESIGNS

James Ward, shown in the downtown mansion he now operates as a catering hall, is building the Savannah, a 35-unit condominium building on Prospect Street, shown at lower right in a rendering.

window. There are also chic kitchens, mahogany floors, 10-foot doors, crown molding, libraries, huge walk-in closets and one or two marble fireplaces. Other features and finishes that home buyers may see in the catering hall are available by request for installation in the individual homes, Mr. Ward said.

Condo buyers are free to hire their own interior designers. But Mr. Ward said he hoped they would choose to work with him to customize their homes because he loves to brainstorm about design.

Mr. Ward, who says he dropped out of school when he was 12 and spent years traveling around Europe and working in the construction trades, today owns 35 buildings in northern New Jersey through his company, Ward & O'Donnell. Most are commercial or retail buildings.

A self-taught architect, designer, property manager and developer who has been "very lucky, by the grace of God," as he put it, Mr. Ward makes regular use of the chapel in the mansion on East Broad Street.

He described Westfield as a perfect place for older adults who expressly do not want to live in New Jersey's "gray belt" towns to the south and west.

He praised the town as one of the highest-quality amenities he could offer to potential home buyers. It won a Great American Main Street Award from the National Trust for Preservation, he noted, adding, "It offers residents the feel of a classic old town with the appeal of contemporary shops and social activities."

Furthermore, the downtown train station is just a block away from the Savannah.

The condo building will provide concierge service, a community room with a prep kitchen for catered parties and two underground parking spaces per home.

Elegant Homes Realty of Westfield is the agency showing condos at the building.