

## YOUR HOME RENEWAL

# Trenton MAKES...

*HHG Development draws buyers by updating historical housing stock and offering arty lofts at low prices*



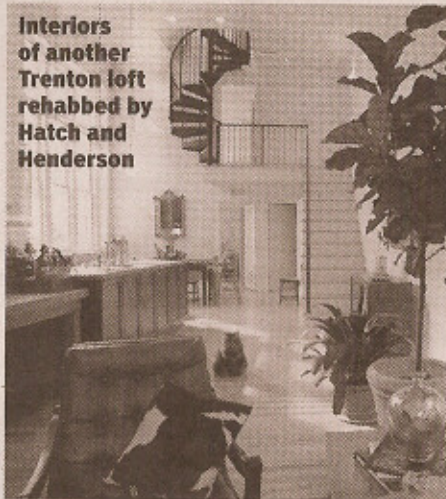
**By Jason Sheftell**  
Daily News  
Real Estate  
Correspondent

**W**hen Fabienne Clark tells people she's moving to Trenton, they look at her like she's a little off. But the Wall Street legal staffer knows better.

Clark bought a two-bedroom loft for just over \$200,000 in the Cracker Factory, a converted 1800s manufacturing facility in the Trenton Ferry neighborhood that blew away anything she saw in New York City for the price, construction quality and space. She even got about \$10,000 back from a New Jersey state financial program geared toward promoting urban development.

"Whenever anyone puts Trenton down, I just look at them and say you need to regroup and see what they got going on there," says Clark, a Bedford-Stuyvesant renter who closes on her 1,200-square-foot home in January. "I saw a lot of trash in New York before they showed me this."

**Interiors  
of another  
Trenton loft  
rehabbed by  
Hatch and  
Henderson**

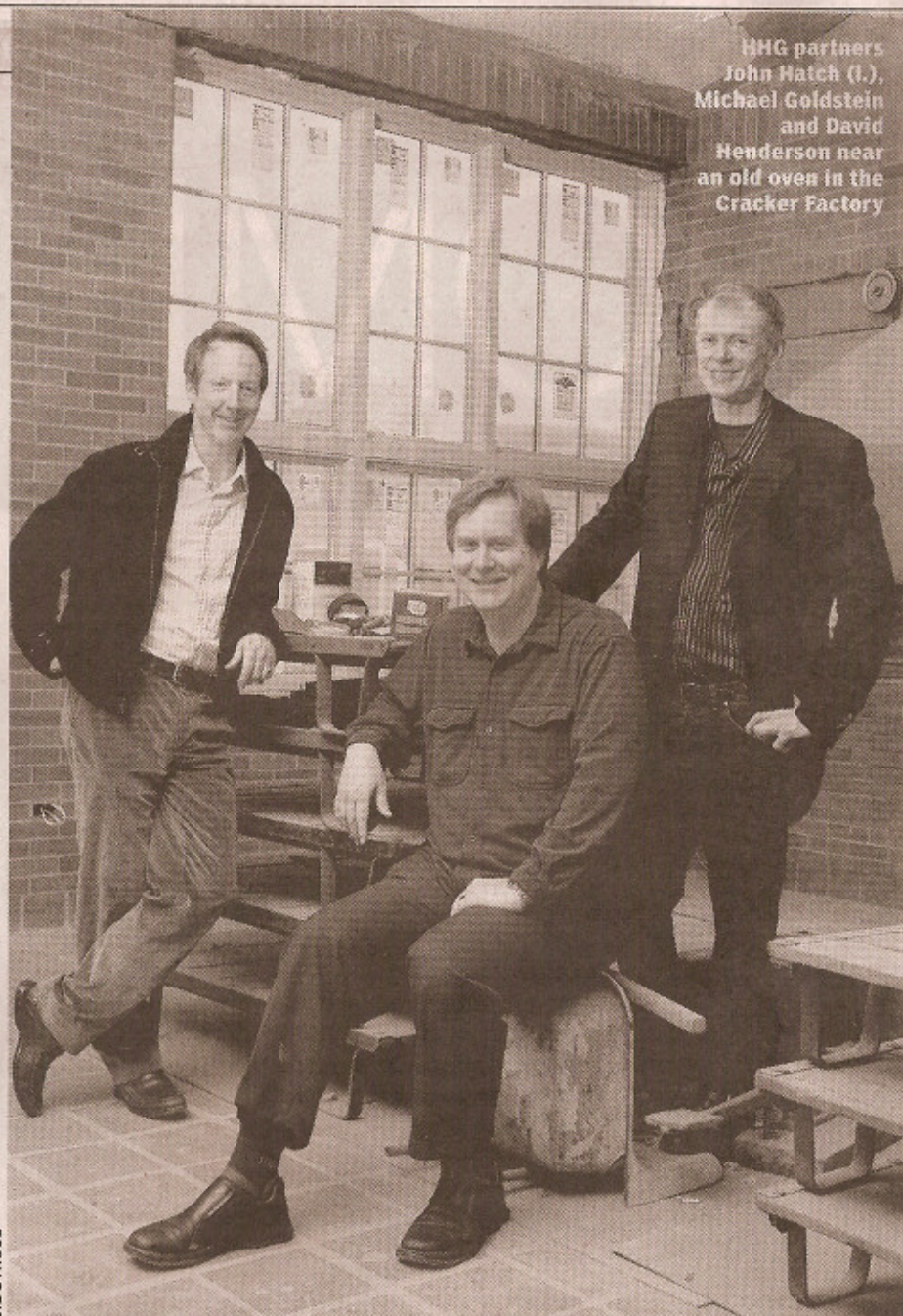


MICHAEL MANCISO

CIE STROUD

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HHG partners  
John Hatch (l.),  
Michael Goldstein  
and David  
Henderson near  
an old oven in the  
Cracker Factory

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Clark found HHG after surfing the net for affordable homes. She saw her loft for the first time on a Saturday and signed a contract the next day.

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Of 19 total units, five are now for sale, including a 1,236-square-foot, two-bedroom, two-bath duplex for \$199,500, Everett Corner, a nearby HHG

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"They" are HHG Development Associates, three partners committed to improving the housing stock in the often-criticized New Jersey capital city. Composed of two architects and an ex-technology executive heading up sales and marketing, HHG fights daily to improve Trenton's reputation and draw new residents.

With quiet streets that feel more Brooklyn Heights than Washington Heights, a new train

station and a community that celebrates ethnic and sexual diversity, Trenton may be poised to dispel the popular perception that it's not a livable city.

"Our target housing market extends from the Bronx to Philadelphia," says David Henderson, an HHG partner and preservation architect who moved to Trenton 19 years ago from Hell's Kitchen after working with Robert A.M. Stern Architects. "New York City is just an hour away. It's closer to midtown for some buyers than where they live in Brooklyn."

According to Henderson, it's more than location that attracts buyers.

"We're offering people a chance to live in renovated historic housing at prices that are a steal,"

he says. "When they first hear these prices, they think, 'I could buy this.' When they see the units, it's, 'Wait, I actually want to buy this.'"

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"I was looking for something with historic charm, exposed brick and high ceilings," says Clark, who will commute to Wall Street. "I got 17-foot ceilings in my new home. It's magnificent. I started buying really big art because my apartment can fit it."

All units at the Cracker Factory, manufacturing site of the world's first oyster cracker, possess configurations that range from Victorian row

houses to industrial spaces. Each unit comes with on-site garage parking. Security systems with motion detectors around doors and windows are standard.

Of 19 total units, five are now for sale, including a 1,236-square-foot, two-bedroom, two-bath duplex for \$199,500. Everett Corner, a nearby HHG development with 800-square-foot rehabbed units starting at \$119,000, is sold out.

Clark attended the Cracker Factory ribbon cutting, where she met Trenton Mayor Douglas H. Palmer.

"Trenton has tremendous housing stock," says Palmer, who was instrumental in the \$75 million train station rehab. "Developers like HHG who are re-creating these buildings for lofts and



Along Livingston St., across from historic Mill Hill Park in Trenton, the homes look out onto a statue of George Washington



A before (left) and after of developer Goldstein's restored Trenton townhouse. He bought it for \$305,000 in 2003 from Hatch and Henderson, prior to working with them.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL GOLDSTEIN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL GOLDSTEIN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL GOLDSTEIN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES.



Members of Trenton's Passage Theatre Company

CIE STROUD

funky housing give the city a new dynamic that adds value."

Asked about crime statistics that put Trenton, population 80,000, near the top of homicides for cities that size, the mayor stays optimistic.

"These crimes are not happening in middle-class neighborhoods," says Palmer, referring to the 18 homicides so far this year, compared to 25 in 2007. "HHG recognizes that we have become an opportunity-based urban market."

All three partners of HHG Development live in Trenton. Henderson and architect John Hatch, life partners, moved there in the late 1980s. They restored over 25 houses in Mill Hill, a historic five-block neighborhood of brick and wood Federal-style and Victorian homes. If you like quaint and charming, Mill Hill is as picturesque as the colonial stretches of Greenwich Village.

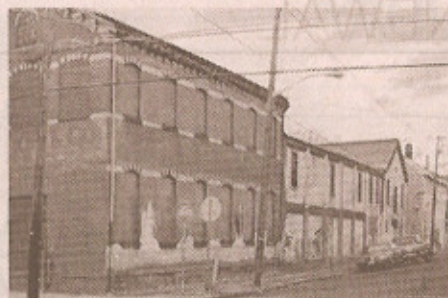
Henderson and Hatch, a partner in Trenton's biggest architecture firm, have two children with a lesbian couple living across the street. HHG

partner Michael Goldstein, a Harvard Business School graduate and technology executive who started in real estate after moving from Princeton to Trenton five years ago, handles sales and acquisitions.

"We've had families, single people, freelancers, architects and photographers all buy at the Cracker Factory and Everett Corner," says Goldstein, whose wife runs Trenton's Passage Theatre, an independent playhouse with a national following. "This is not living in the suburbs. It's a vibrant city with culture and incredible homes for almost no money. That's why this town is selling."

In the past four months, HHG sold six homes. Last Saturday, three sets of prospective buyers looked at the Cracker Factory.

"Trenton is a walking city," says Henderson, who loves cities so much that he and Hatch have vacationed in Buffalo to see industrial architecture. "Once we attract new buyers to the historic houses and converted lofts, we can start to build



MICHAEL GOLDSTEIN



The boarded-up Cracker Factory (left, top), bought by HHG for \$400,000, now boasts restored lofts (left, bottom). Below, the streets of Trenton.



new contextual properties. Hopefully, that can take this city to its next level."

Cracker Factory buyer M. Elizabeth Austin also wants the city to keep moving forward. The nonprofit worker, who now commutes to 34th St. from Canarsie, will move in to her \$184,000 two-bedroom triplex (with a parking space in the garage) in January.

"All of us buyers share a common interest," says first-time homeowner Austin, who will pay \$350 for a monthly New Jersey transit pass to New York City. "This is a startup place for us before we move on to something bigger."

And Trenton?

"When I first saw Trenton online, I was like, no way," she says. "But then you see all this space and realize how much you can get for your money, and your thought process changes fast."

To learn about HHG Development, go to [www.trentonferry.com](http://www.trentonferry.com) or call (609) 638-3250.

### MY VERDICT

Pulling into Trenton, you pass the ballpark where the Yankees' AA team plays. There's a bridge with the "Trenton Makes, the World Takes" sign. A statue of George Washington marks actual battle sites that turned the Revolutionary War in America's favor. These symbols of passing eras convey the energy of a changing city.

Mill Hill is as pretty a neighborhood as a city can have. The capitol and historic buildings have zero graffiti. People kayak on the river running through town. There are still problems. Apartments and cars get broken into. But that happens in the West Village. For the prices and quality, I haven't seen anything matching HHG's offerings this close to New York City. With a little money and some guts, it might be for you.

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