
How Old Names Make New Places: The Contemporary Nomenclature of American Real Estate

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Enter *Continuum South Beach's* magnificent lobby and experience luxury lifestyle services at their finest. The valet, concierge and front desk staffs make your life a breeze. Private beach cabana attendants set up your lounge chairs, and offer towels, drinks and food. For those that demand the ultimate oceanfront bliss, spacious cabanas that face the pool are offered for sale¹.

Place-names identify and indicate localities, whether they are natural features, such as rivers or mountains, or populated places, such as towns or streets. In the case of human communities, the names reveal important facts about settlement history, folklore, social changes, and religious influences, not to exclude personal ambitions. Washington, for instance, was bestowed upon the federal capital in honor of the Pater Patriae, the way Independence was chosen for its patriotic appeal or Salem for its religious implications. Other names were transferred from Europe, such as Versailles and New Orleans, or adapted from Native languages, like Milwaukee² and Omaha³. It is not surprising that real estate developers have been inspired by these practices, explaining, for instance, the presence of Le Deauville Apartments or Windsor Homes in the heart of snow-capped Colorado.

Considering this seems a recurrent naming pattern in real estate today, although it has developed a flavor of its own in the United States, this paper is

¹ Ad posted on <Miami.condo.com>

² From Ojibwe/Potawatomi *milioke*, "good soil".

³ The city was named after the Omaha people whose own name means "upstream (people)" or "those going against the wind or current".

going to address the continuity of this practice as well as explain the rationale behind such an option. However, unlike most cities, the nomenclature of apartment and condominium complexes is often determined by criteria that are exclusively dictated by market objectives. Financial purposes undeniably impose that the names be adequately chosen to attract potential clients. These motivations might explain that high-rise condominiums by the names of Brittany Place Apartments, Cambridge Oak Apartments, or Viking Properties can be found in a city like Houston where half of the residents are Hispanic. This study, whose database includes a wide panel of real estate ads posted on the Internet, will therefore also examine which cultural elements are currently inspirational, which representations are favored, and which images operate positively in their appeal to the public. Finally, it will evaluate the complexities of the re-appropriation process, with a special focus on how this heritage is being reinvented and reinterpreted à l'américaine to meet the demands of prospective buyers.

Toponymic Transfers: Maintaining a Continuum

In a city like Denver, Col., the Rocky Mountains impose their majestic verticality from every angle. Not surprisingly developers have relied on the scenic surroundings to name their projects *Westridge Apartments*, *Western Terrace*, *Vantage Point Apartments*, *Mountain Crest*, *Mountain Terrace Apartments* or *Alpine Resort*. These imposing designations assuredly bespeak for the splendid vista points that are guaranteed to future residents. *Mountain Run Apartments* and *Mountain Vista Apartments* (in nearby Lakewood) likewise echo *Mountain Vista Apartments* and *Camden Pinnacle* (in suburban Aurora). Coined locally, the names conjure the freshness of creeks, as *Cascade Village* suggests, or the immediate wilderness, as evoked by *Deer Crest Apartments*, or again an appealing tranquility as *Mountain Shadows Townhouses* in nearby Boulder indicates⁴.

Why then disrupt this charm and introduce foreign elements, as with *Alpenhaus Apartments* or *Chateau Chamonix Condominiums*, quite appropriately located at 2340 Apres Ski Way, in close-by *Steamboat Springs*?⁵ The response is a simple one: the Alps are a winner. The European range is famous worldwide not only for its winter sports but also for its stunning peaks and spectacular scenery.

⁴ *Yahoo Yellow Pages - Real Estate, Apartment Complexes*. <http://yp.yahoo.com>. Once on *Yahoo Yellow Pages*, Section *Apartment Complexes*", enter the name of the city that you wish to prospect. Lists of projects will be displayed with their full addresses but no pictures, links to interactive maps, and occasionally additional information/comments on the property on sale.

Chamonix itself is a true jewel for nature lovers, mountaineers, hardcore skiers and even one-day visitors. Its après ski life, with its warm, relaxed evenings and cheese fondues at the local chalets, confirms the privilege. While there are a great number of eligible American names to praise the splendor of the Rockies, references to the Old Word bring an additional exoticism, some sort of evasion that the originality of foreign names might suggest more convincingly.

If the Rockies can nurture numerous beautiful, ecstatic dreams about the country's wilderness and stupendous nature, this toponymic exoticism is not their exclusive prerogative. It can be found in regions as arid as the Southwest, as urban as the East Coast, or as hurricane swept as the Gulf of Mexico. In Miami for instance, the ocean breeze and the blue seas call for expected names like *Atlantic Air Apartments*, *Blue Lagoon Apartments*, *Blue Riviera*, *Emerald Palms*, *Tropical Pool Apartments*, *Everglades On The Bay*, or *Biscayne Breeze Condominiums*. However, there too, a need for less conventional names is expressed, as with *Villagio In The Grove Condominiums* (located at 2803 Coconut Ave), *Les Chalets Apartments*, *Promenade at Adventura Apartments*, *Spanish Trace Condominiums*, or *Monte Carlo-Miami Apartments*⁶.

The American people being a "Nation of immigrants" as President John F. Kennedy once phrased it, the newcomers who established themselves in America in the 19th century were culturally only a step away from home. Out of love and probable nostalgia they quite frequently applied European names to their new settlements, often inspired by their capitals and other great cities of their respective homelands. This explains why Old World transfers such as *Berlin*, *Warsaw*, *Lisbon*, *Albuquerque*, *Toledo*, *Syracuse*, and *Birmingham*⁷ – all American cities, whose names had often been bestowed in the hope of creating a familiar, reassuring environment in lieu of the wilderness - complement toponymic creations like *Cincinnati*, *Sioux City*, *Notre Dame*, *Minneapolis*, *Detroit*, *Santa Fe*, and *Columbia*. The contrast is even more flagrant with the countless indigenous toponyms that have been borrowed from the Natives, such as *Chicago*, *Seattle*, *Wheeling*, and *Miami*. As Louis Henry Mencken, in his widely acclaimed scientific linguistic study entitled *The American Language*, wrote in 1921:

⁵ *Google Maps*. <http://maps.google.com>

⁶ *Luxury Condos - US Condo Exchange*. <http://www.condo.com/Luxury>. Click on the city that you wish to prospect. Lists of projects with their pictures are displayed with their addresses, additional pictures, property details, sales data, neighbourhood information, and resident reviews.

⁷ Some of these international toponyms were placed on the map for their European exoticism, by immigrants that had no cultural bond with the cities involved, as was the case for *Toledo* or

Constant familiarity with such immigrants from foreign languages and with the general speech habits of foreign peoples has made American a good deal more hospitable to loan-words than English, even in the absence of special pressure. Let the same word knock at the gates of the two languages, and American will admit it more readily, and give it at once a wider and more intimate currency⁸.

Real estate developers have quite naturally applied the formula, which consists in borrowing existing names and giving them a new polish in the New World. Facing the breezy Pacific shore, San Francisco is nonetheless home to *Normandy Apartments* and *Hampton Court Apartments*, the way *Maverick Dallas* is to *Victorian Apartments*, or tropical Miami to *Venitian Isle Apartments* and *Corinthian Condominiums*. Obviously, there is an assumption that European names convey a sense of elegance and achievement, as *Alexandria House*, *Post Toscana*, *London Terrace Gardens*, *Milan Condos*, *San (sic) Tropez Condos*, *Oxford on 72 Condos* (located at 422 E 72nd St), and *Stonehenge Condos* in New York seem to confirm⁹. Situated north of Miami on the sandy beaches of Sunny Isles, *Acqualina*, “a Celebration of Art. Architecture & Life”, with its “enchanting Mediterranean villa atmosphere”, offers “world-class services and endless opportunity to relax and rejuvenate”.

In *Acqualina Ocean Residences*, form, function, style and substance combine with striking beauty and originality. The result is a seaside residential masterpiece unlike any other on the South Florida skyline. Created with a stunning clarity of vision by the developers of Williams Island, *Acqualina* is a seamless blend of classical elegance and modern technology; a reinvention of the architectural splendor of Europe along the dazzling shores of a tropical paradise¹⁰.

If urban planners and developers are actually taking very little risk when associating both the Old and the New World, it is precisely because these European loan-names establish an expected cultural *continuum* within the Western

Syracuse.

⁸ Henry Louis Mencken, *The American Language, An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States*. 1921. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. Chapter VI, “Tendencies in American”, Section 4 “Foreign Influences Today”.

Accessible on line at <http://www.bartleby.com/185> (2009).

⁹ *Yahoo Yellow Pages* – *op. cit.*

¹⁰ *Luxury Condos* – Miami Metro Area. http://miami.condo.com/Condo-Hotel_Condo_Sunny-Isles-Beach_33160_ACQUALINA_2678384

world. In Denver, properties named *The Cambridge Apartments*, *Trafalgar Square*, *Canterbury Apartments*, *Corsican Apartments*, *Windsor Court Apartments*, and *Paloma Villa*¹¹, respectively located on Steele St, Bellaire St, Sherman St, Gaylord St, Parker Rd and Morrison Rd (which shows there are no transfers from street names to the development names, as is the case for instance with *Monaco Place Apartments*, situated at 3355 S Monaco Pkwy)¹², immediately associate Old World nobility with New World requirements. Which criteria are retained to coin these names is what we are going to see next.

Classical Elegance

A dominant architectural style in America between 1820 and 1850, the Greek Revival movement developed a symbolic association with Greek democracy, thus allowing the new nation to give way to its nationalism. Greek place names, street names, and architecture became popular throughout the Northeast¹³. Born out of a desire to assert America's own cannons, and therefore to estrange the new nation from the motherland, especially from its ecclesiastical and aristocratic associations, the trend manifested itself every time, for instance, westbound pioneers named their new settlements *Athens*, sixteen of which have survived until this day. *Rome*, *Attica*, *Arcadia*, and *Troy*, which also originated in the East, were similarly transferred west, multiple echoes to *Akron*, *Urbana*, *Homer*, *Eureka*, *Utica*, *Alexandria*, *Delphi*, *Pompey*, *Euclid*, *Carthage*, *Cicero*, and *Memphis*¹⁴, not to mention metropolises like *Phoenix*, *Cincinnati*, and *Philadelphia* (although the Biblical reference is also to be considered here)¹⁵.

The modern tendency to name real estate developments in a classical fashion seems to be in direct legacy of these early practices. *Octavia Apartments*, *Coliseum Park Apartments*, and *Colonnade Condos* in New York City awaken a sense of *grandeur* and elitism among potential buyers. *Atrium Luxury Apartments* in Miami, *Ben Hur Apartments* in San Francisco, or *Alpha Towers Apartments*, *Angelus*

¹¹ Yahoo Yellow Pages – *op. cit.*

¹² Google Maps, *op. cit.*

¹³ For a comprehensive study on classical names, see Evan T. Sage, "Classical Place-Names in America", *American Speech* 4 (1929): 261-71, as well as Zelinsky Wilbur, "Classical Town Names in the United States", *Geographical Review* 57 (1967): 463-96

¹⁴ For more information on *Memphis* and Illinois' "Egypt", check Grace Partridge Smith, "They Call It Egypt", *Names* 2 (March 1954): 51-54.

¹⁵ Philadelphia, or the "City of Brotherly Love", was founded by the highly religious William Penn in 1681-1682. For more information on the town names mentioned in this paragraph, check George Rippey Stewart, *American Place-Names: A Concise and Selective Dictionary for the Continental United States of America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Apartments, Antioch Haven, Carolan Apartments and *Antique Row Condominiums* in Chicago can morph any project into some splendid achievement. There is beauty and accomplishment in those names, grace and elegance in their melody. In the Denver area, *Athenia Apartments, Concordia On The Lake, and Trieste Condominiums* reproduce the same pattern, as does *Patrician Apartments*. If the latter complex does not display any particular elegance but that of solid concrete, its history laden name will no doubt compensate for its somewhat ordinary architecture¹⁶.

Other classical charm can be evidenced with Latin or Greek (sounding) names, as in *Brittania Heights Apartments* and *Alexan At Arista* in greater Denver, *Intermedia* in Chicago, *Metropolis* in New York City, or again *Oceania*, a luxury condominium in Miami that offers a spectacular view on the ocean and the city¹⁷. The very noun *condominium*, which the English adopted from Medieval Latin in the 19th century with the meaning of “shared (cum) sovereignty (dominium)”, is not fortuitous. Inspired from the Greek *apogeion*, “far from the earth” (via the French *apogée*), *Apogee South Beach Condominiums* will be, when achieved¹⁸ at the southern tip of South Beach, “the very pinnacle of modern luxury living...It is more than you need and all that you desire”. With all residences having their “own Private Elevators” to reach elevated floors – far from the earth, indeed - *Apogee* will be “the crowing jewel of South Beach... the most luxurious project to ever come to South Beach. Only a select few will have the rare opportunity to obtain a unit of this fabulous location”¹⁹. An echo to the three American towns (in NM, KS and WA) and the multitude of businesses registered under the name of *Acme* (a Greek synonym to *apogeion*), *Apogee South Beach Condominiums* is doing nothing less than pursuing a dream of excellence and ultimate perfection. Here as in many other similar places, no limit has been set and could be envisaged by the future residents who will all enjoy an “Infinity Edge Pool in Garden Setting”²⁰.

Another “Greek” echo to these neoclassical names is *El Greco Apartments* in Denver, not *stricto sensu* obviously, although the name celebrates art, the way in that city *Davinci Apartments*, a few blocks from *De Medici Apartments*, in the same Virginia Village, or *Renoir House* (a gated community) and *Van Gogh Apartments* in New York City do. The nationwide nature of this naming pattern, as evidenced

¹⁶ Yahoo Yellow Pages, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ The “building details” posted on the website actually indicate that it was built in 2007, which somehow contradicts the ad on the homepage.

¹⁹ *Luxury Condos* – Miami Metro Area. http://miami.condo.com/Condo_Miami-Beach_33139_Apogee_125

in the South's regional capital, Atlanta, a city home to *Post Renaissance Apartments*, *Muse's Lofts* and *Art Foundry Condominiums*, makes it all the more remarkable. Dallas itself declines a few *Renaissance* places, as with *Renaissance and Renaissance On Turtle Creek*, not to mention its elegant *Grand Treviso Condominiums*, an echo to *Murano Grande*, a luxurious bayfront high-rise in Miami Beach, with large balconies, mahogany floors, granite and marble countertops... and Italian cabinetry²¹.

Manors, Estates and Chateaux.

Other "grand" names will stake on their royal heritage to capture the attention of prospective clients. *Hillcrest Regency* and *Royal Apartments* in San Diego, *Tudor Gate* in Long Island (NY), *Regency Tower* in Miami, *Colonial Homes Apartments* and *Victoria Apartments* in Atlanta, *Peninsula Regent* in San Francisco reveal their regal origin, ennobling the complexes they are attached to. All across the country, the royal seal has profusely knighted places like *Crown Towers Apartments*, *Kingsway Apartments* and *Windsor Manor*, not to mention the frequent use of generics such as arms, a direct inspiration from English inns, as in *Rex Arms Apartments* in San Francisco, or court, which has bloomed beautifully in America, witness this elegant *Cobblestone Court Apartments* in Seattle²².

The generic *manor* confers comparable titles of nobility to places it is bestowed upon, such as *Regency Manor Apartments* and *Chelsea Manor Apartments* in Miami, *Crest Manor Apartments* and *Trinity Manor* in San Diego, *Montview Manor* in Denver, *Westminster Manor* in Queens (NY), *Manor Oaks Apartments* in Dallas, or *Salisbury Park Manor* in San Francisco. The intent is clearly to secure interest and possibly awe among elect buyers who are offered a lifestyle of luxury along with the feeling of living in six star condominiums while maybe only paying a relatively moderate price for it. A few decades ago, however, there had been some controversy about the noun, as the following story illustrates. When in 1947 the Chamber of Commerce of Huntington Station (Long Island, NY) decided to change the name of the city to Huntington Manor, some residents expressed their concern, as did a certain Fred H. Koster who commented in the local press (Letter to the editor):

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ All quotations are from *Yahoo Yellow Pages – op. cit.*, except for *Murano Grande* that was posted on <http://miami.condocompany.com/South-Beach/Murano-Grande>

²² *ibid.*

The word “Manor” is defined by Webster, who is considered an authority in defining the meaning of words, as meaning “Land belonging to a noble, or so much as lie has kept for his own use ; jurisdiction of a court baron”. As we are far removed from feudal age and customs the word “Manor” certainly is meaningless and foolish in so far as it applies to Huntington Station²³.

Another correspondent, Harold E. Willmott, disagreed with the position, counter-arguing a few days later that when the House & Home Company opened up hundreds of acres on both sides of the railroad, they originally called the lots *Huntington Manor*, Section X, X varying according to the sections.

Perhaps they thought - if they ever considered it - that all purchasers would be “Lords of the Manor” - a thing even Mr. Koster might approve, perhaps. [...] No, Mr. Koster, though a “rose by any other name” may smell as sweet, I think and have always thought that the name “Station” gave this district a distinctly dark hue, if not an actual black eye. I have no doubt that the officials of the “Station” Bank, being progressive and farseeing men, will gladly change the name of their bank to the Bank Huntington Manor. I’d like to ask Mr. Koster - since he is so particular about feudal or royal titles, who is Emperor of the Empire State?²⁴

Early 21st century developers might smile at the anecdote, convinced that any manor addition to an apartment or condominium complex name is an indisputable bonus. One must admit that the noun does not infer the same class and elegance as its British counterpart, but rather “lavish and extravagant properties”, as advertized by a website selling luxury condos nationwide²⁵. In Miami, for instance, modern “Lords” are promised to “enjoy the South Florida lifestyle the way you deserve”²⁶. All future residents will be treated like VIPs, certain to experience a sumptuous lifestyle, with valets and concierges to serve them. These modern Lords might contemplate purchasing stupendous estate(s), another generic meant to confer space and authority, as in *Fair View Estates*, *Golf View Gardens*, *Ocean Heights Estates*, and *Cambridge Estates* in the New York City area, where paradoxically space is a highly limited commodity²⁷. Like manor, the

²³ Arthur Minton, “Names of Real-Estate Developments”, *Names* 7 (June, Dec. 1959), p. 142.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 143.

²⁵ *Luxury Condos – Home Page*, *op. cit.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Minton, *op. cit.*, p. 145-52.

generic homes, as in *Mayfair Homes* in San Francisco, *Parliament Homes* in Long Island (NY), *Mesa Verde Apartment Homes* in Denver, or *Westminster Manor Homes* in San Diego, has been transcended. The snug domestic happiness associated with the British use of home has irrevocably shifted from cozy intimacy to grand privacy. If *Shoma Homes Splendido* is a relatively quiet condominium complex in Miami, it is incontestably as “splendido” as it is cozy²⁸.

When not transferred from Britain, “aristocratic” habitation names most frequently get their inspiration from royal or classy France, a toponymic pirouette with which the American *republic* is entirely at ease as evidenced by all these New World’s “chateaux”. *Nob Hill Chateau*, *Chateau Lafayette*, and *Chateau Suites* in San Francisco echo *Chateau Montagne* in Atlanta, *Chateau Des Fleurs Apartments* in Los Angeles, and *Chateau Elizabeth*, *Chateau Grove Condominiums*, and *Chateau Riviera in Miami* - which also counts *Chantilly Condos* and *Le Trianon Condominiums*. In and around Boston, *Chateau Din Condominiums*, *Chateau Estates*, and *Chateau Anne Apartments* set the trend for *Al’s Golden Chateau*, a hair salon, and its twin (in a nearby town) *The Hair Chateau*. Incidentally, *Le Château*, a Canadian clothing brand “offering contemporary fashion apparel, accessories and footwear to style-conscious women and men”, is “Canada’s dress destination”²⁹.

Pompous *Trianon Park*, *Le Chambord Condo*, *Parc Vendome*, and *Le Domaine* in New York rival with grandiloquent *Versailles Apartments* in Chicago, which has its counterparts in *Royalle Condominiums*, *Regal Apartments*, and *Reyes Apartments* elsewhere in the Windy City. *Casa Royale Apartments* in Kansas City echo *Royale Condominiums* in Brooklyn (NY), while in Colorado *El Castillo Apartments* (Denver) rival with *Chateau Blanc Condominiums* (Aspen) for prestige³⁰. In Dallas *Regal Villas* compete in elegance with *Versailles Aparments*, whereas in Miami Beach *Viceroy Residences* offer royal class along with “smart building technology with 24 hr concierge services via touch screen access, as well as luxurious swimming pools and landscaped terraces”³¹.

²⁸ *Yahoo Yellow Pages, op. cit.*

²⁹ *Le Château, Canada’s Ladieswear and Menswear*. <http://www.lechateau.com/en/index>

“Founded in 1959, Le Château’s humble beginnings started at a single store on the hip Ste. Catherine Street in Montreal. Discover more than 40 years of fashion history in the making. One of Le Château’s strongest competitive advantages is our vertically integrated facilities, which manufactures over 1.5 million high-quality garments annually. Vertical integration allows us to benefit from shorter lead times and realize greater flexibility in our product planning and production, reducing overall fashion risk. Although percentages vary by season, approximately 40% of all Le Château clothing is proudly manufactured in Canada”.

³⁰ *Yahoo Yellow Pages, op. cit.*

³¹ *Luxury Condos - Miami Metro Area*. http://miami.condo.com/Condo-Hotel_Condo_Miami-Beach_33139_Viceroy-Residences_1403055

Known for his grandiloquent projects, Donald Trump has elevated one of his extravaganzas into the Miami sky, known as *Trump Royale*. Located at Sunny Isles Beach, north of Miami, the tower “features unparalleled, uninterrupted views of the Atlantic Ocean and Intracoastal Waterway”, with all possible services and amenities, like, as befits its royal French name, “Porte-cochere with valet parking”, not to count “oversized walk-in closets”, “hurricane rated, tinted-exterior windows”, sun decks, “professional concierge services”, and “a beautifully manicured gatehouse entry with 24-hour attendant”. Assuredly, “no expense has been spared in the design and magnificent obsession to detail in the generously apportioned interiors and flawless craftsmanship”³².

A French touch is often expected to enhance a building’s status, especially a high-rise, with status thus matching height. In New York City *Le Rivage*, French Apartments, and Paris Apartments signal refinement and panache, while in other cities across the country “Le Marquis” takes his mark and sets precedence, as evidenced by *Marquis Plaza Apartments* in Kansas City, *Marquis at Preston Park Condos* and *The Marquis On Cedar Springs* in Dallas, *Marquis at Town Center* in Broomfield (near Denver), and *Renaissance Marquis*, “a retirement residence worthy of being called home”, in Rome, Georgia³³. Other French references include names like, for instance in Miami, *L’Excellence Condominiums*, *Fontainebleu* (sic) *Apartments*, *Soleil Lake Condominiums*, *Le Nautique*, a luxury white and blue bayfront building, and *L’Hermitage*, “a beautifully architectural-designed community with a unique Mediterranean villa feel, which has the coastline of Biscayne Bay as a backyard”³⁴. Whereas *Vendome On Turtle Creek* is a “quiet haven in Dallas prestigious Turtle Creek neighbourhood”³⁵ offering valet parking services, in the same city *La Tour Condominiums* is a luxury high-rise that deserves the name, the way *La Tour de la Défense* or *La Tour Montparnasse* do in Paris.

As the preceding examples illustrate, American identity is highly permeable to external elements, continuously absorbing them. Americans indeed display an incredible inventiveness, seeing life through fresh eyes, revisiting the world, in a grand, enthusiastic, and probably to a stranger’s eyes, excessive manner. This explains why no small home will ever be seen that way. No ordinary place will be

³² *Luxury Condos* – Miami Metro Area http://miami.condo.com/Condo_Sunny-Isles-Beach_33160_Trump-Royale_4580738

³³ *Renaissance Marquis Retirement Village*. <http://www.renaissancemarquis.com/marquis>

³⁴ *Luxury Condos* – Miami Metro Area. http://miami.condo.com/Condo_Miami_33133_Lhermitage_1448012

³⁵ *Luxury Condos* – Dallas Metro Area. http://dallas.condo.com/Condo_DALLAS_Vendome-On-

called as such. As Dr. Harry Morgan Ayres, English Professor at Columbia University wrote in “The English Language in America”, in Volume 18 of *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature (1907–1921)*,

The wish to see things afresh and for himself is so characteristic of the American that neither in his speech nor his most considered writing does he need any urging to seek out ways of his own. He refuses to carry on his verbal traffic with the well-worn counters; he will always be new-minting them. ... The American’s slang is not made up of words that look like words, as is the case with much British slang, but words that are things, images; grotesque, preposterous, perhaps, but born of a quick fancy. He has an Elizabethan love of exuberant language³⁶.

In the case of development names, being inspired by a European corpus does not imply that urban planners content themselves with copying-pasting it. Even though the names are transferred from a variety of European cultures, they are re-appropriated, often in “a quick fancy”, through a process of adjustment and reinvention. This is why this nomenclature can claim an authenticity that is interpretation, not imitation.

American Exuberance

In Chicago, *Grand Plaza*, a rental residence located at 540 N State St # 9, is qualified as “luxurious, serene, exciting – grand”, providing “outstanding convenience, hip nightlife, exquisite boutiques, skyline views”, “life on a grand scale”, “the only apartment residence of its kind in Chicago”³⁷. In a similar manner, situated at the intersection of Grand Ave and Orleans Street, *Grand Orleans* proves an adequate naming, as does *Grandeur*, on 1055 W Granville Ave³⁸. At Miami Beach, *The Grand*, with its floor to ceiling windows, overlooks the Laguna. At *Grand Seasons*, in Dallas, “you will enjoy a blissful way of life along with the best of everything”, including easy access to shopping areas, fine restaurants and entertainment. As the ad claims:

Turtle-Creek_1683521

³⁶ *The Cambridge History*

Of English And American Literature, ed. J. Erskine, S. P. Sherman, W. P. Trent, & C. Van Doren. Volume XVIII American, Part III Later National Literature, Section XXX The English Language in America, § 12. Modern American Tendencies. Accessible online at <http://www.bartleby.com/228/0712.html>. (2009).

³⁷ *Grand Plaza – Chicago*. <http://grandplazachicago.com/>

³⁸ *Google Maps, op. cit.*

Inspired by the elegance and romance of the English countryside, Grand Seasons is where you will experience a combination of graciousness and incredible refinement. You will find yourself inspired by the setting, yet captured by the service. Release all thoughts of stressful days on quaint balconies and patio areas. Allow yourself to fade away into a dream come true... Grand Seasons is the perfect place to call home³⁹.

This “Elizabethan love of exuberant language” that Americans display, to quote Dr. Harry M. Ayres, explains daring linguistic combinations such as *Heritage On The Garden* or *Tremont On The Common* in Boston, *Chateau De East*, on Ferncliff Rd NE in Atlanta, or *Delofts* on Delaware St. in Kansas City. As has been discussed before, the articulation between pre-existing cultures and a new set of references and representations seems a recurrent element in place naming in the United States. By innovatively re-configuring the world according to their imaginations, Americans have reconstructed their environment in a way that leaves little room for possible toponymic incongruity or linguistic paradox. Seen from that angle, *Parc Vue Midtown Apartments* in Atlanta, *La* (sic) *Pavillion Condominiums* in Chicago, *Le* (sic) *Premiere Condominiums* in New York, or *The Dakota at Rainier Court* in Seattle do not display any semantic or linguistic incoherence⁴⁰. Imagining that there might be some is not even an issue, as architects and developers have long come out of their naming closet and coined quite a few unusual names. The *Estates At Mira Vista*, located at 10000 E Alameda Ave, Denver, provide elegance and a fantastic view over the mountain range. As the home page of the website - in an unbridled and glamorous manner - predicts: “Living at the Estates at Mira Vista is choosing a lifestyle that’s out of the box. May cause extreme happiness. May cause excessive envy. Everyday inspiration included. Inner beauty. Out of the box”⁴¹.

In terms of grammatical usage, *Cierra Crest* in Denver is an erratic coinage, since it is most probably used as a homonym for *Sierra Crest*, and not for the conjugated form of the Spanish verb *cerrar*, ‘to close’, a use that would be nonsensical here. Yet it rivals brilliantly with other equally evocative *Dakota Ridge Apartments*, *Mesa Verde Condominiums*, or *Monte Bello Manor*. As soon as pioneers migrated west, they let go of their restraints, as Mencken analyzes it, and embarked upon a physical journey as much as a linguistic adventure (although

³⁹ *Rent.com*, <http://www.rent.com/rentals/texas/dallas-fort-worth-and-vicinity/dallas/grand-seasons/16078/>

⁴⁰ All quotes are from *Yahoo Yellow Pages* and *Luxury Condos*, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ *The Estates At Mira Vista*, <http://www.estatesatmiravista.com/index.htm>

they probably did not realize they were), the best example of which being the creativity displayed by Mark Twain, often considered “the father of American literature”.

In Chicago, located on Grand Avenue, *Grand on Grando Condominiums* superbly and superlatively asserts its height, as does *Altos de Miami Condominiums* in Miami or *Skycrest Apartments*, a deluxe garden apartment complex located on Glenview Drive in San Bruno, California⁴². Miami is home to *Space 01* where “the elemental and poetic expression of programmatic systems liberates this mid-rise multifamily residential structure from its typological expectations”⁴³. Others assert their horizontal prerogatives, like *Carlisle On The Parc*, *Miralago At Marston Lake Condominiums*, or *The Courtyard At Lakewood* in Denver. In Dallas, *The Enclave At Stonebrook*, *The Pointe At Stone Canyon*, *The Park On The Creek*, and *The Oaks Of Collin Creek* likewise stretch their domain; the Latin syntax, with a prepositional clause placed after the name, unlike the Anglo-Saxon usage, confirms this quest for refinement. Other complexes opt to preserve their seclusion and serenity, such as *Zen Condo* in Chicago, *The Cove Apartments* or *Enclave* in San Francisco, *Cloisters on The Bay*, a gated waterfront enclave nestled in the heart of Coconut Grove north of Miami, which “will be a village within the village”, or, in the Denver area, these exquisite *Whispering Pines Of Denver*, *Willows at Tamarac* and *Halcyon House*, although the latter is a rather plain block. But does it matter?⁴⁴

All these coinages offer an interesting insight into the construction of American identity. As far as semantics goes, *Hilltop House Retirement Home* in Seattle, *Homes Park Village* in Minneapolis, and *Highland Square Apartment Home* or *Chateau Villa Apartments* in Atlanta sound redundant. However, redundancy seems to double-guarantee that the future occupants will have a home of their own - an apartment home, a townhome, or a village home. Repetition is not superfluous, nor are two names alike. Associating a famous artistic movement with an arboreal species, as in *Renaissance Blue Spruce Townhomes*, in Denver, does not create a breach in logic, nor does *Montreux on the Plaza* in Kansas City. A lengthy name is actually classy, not confusing, as it adds class... to class⁴⁵. *Oakwood at Enclave at Belleview Station*, a residence hotel on Monaco Street, in Denver, was “created for those who know what they want out of life. These elegant homes of

⁴² Google Maps, *op. cit.*

⁴³ *Luxury Condos* – Miami Metro Area, http://miami.condo.com/Condo_North-Bay-Village_33141_Space-01_1448018

⁴⁴ All quotes are from *Yahoo Yellow Pages* and *Luxury Condos*, *op. cit.*

distinction provide carefree living with personalized service. You will be surrounded by natural beauty and vitality"⁴⁶.

Apartment complexes like *Best-of-Life Park* and *Shangri-La By The Lake* are undeniably ego boosters. They unveil the hopes that potential residents have nurtured in terms of lifestyle, leisure, and family life. Whether the names are a fair representation of reality actually is not the point. "At best, the relationship between topographic words and their meanings is precarious"⁴⁷, said Donald J. Orth, of the U. S. Geological Survey, in 1972. *Life at Chateau Care Of Ste Genevieve*, a long term care and hospice in Ste Genevieve, Missouri, is most likely not exactly glamorous⁴⁸, nor is this stupendous *Le Chateau Mobile Home Village*, a trailer park at Union, Missouri. Yet, what matters is how the surroundings that these toponyms depict fulfill the imagination. Louis Mencken qualified "the special character of American" in *The American Language*, in 1921, as follows:

A general impatience of rule and restraint, a democratic enmity to all authority, an extravagant and often grotesque humor, an extraordinary capacity for metaphor—in brief, all the natural marks of what Van Wyck Brooks⁴⁹ calls "a popular life which bubbles with energy and spreads and grows and slips away ever more and more from the control of tested ideas, a popular life with the lid off"⁵⁰.

Real estate names boast their Americanness, as with this *Promenade The Concierge Desk*, an apartment complex in New York City, or *Vendome the Front Desk* in Dallas. The more unique the name is, the more appealing the place. In Atlanta a business that specializes in painting services has quite appropriately been called *A Renaissance In Faux*, a picturesque and attractive designation that matches in colors those of *La (sic) Chateau Beauty Salon* in Chicago and *Chateau Salon of Beauty* in Los Angeles⁵¹.

Sail the world in all directions: that is what this nomenclature entices to. Embark upon adventure, like at *Caravelle Apartments* in Denver, whether the journey is one in fashion and style at *Hip Hop Apartments* in Chicago, in patriotism

⁴⁵ *Yahoo Yellow Pages*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ *Hotels Travels.com*: http://www.hotelstravel.com/North_America/US/CO/Denver/OakwoodAtEnclaveAtBellevueStation.html

⁴⁷ Donald J. Orth, "The Nature of Topographic Terms", *Indiana Names* 3.2 (1972): 5-18.

⁴⁸ *Gilbert Guide*. <http://www.gilbertguide.com/senior-care-directory/missouri/sainte-genevieve-assisted-living-facilities.html>

⁴⁹ American critic, biographer, and literary historian.

⁵⁰ Mencken, *op. cit.* Chapter VI, "Tendencies in American", Section 1 "General Characteristics".

⁵¹ *Yahoo Yellow Pages*, *op. cit.*

at *USA Apartments*, in Waukegan, IL, or in pragmatism at *Efficient Condominiums* in Chicago. And if you are lost in San Francisco, you could always stop and ask your way at *What Plaza Apartments*. Keep the dream alive at *Aladdin Apartments*, in Denver⁵². None of your expectations will be outrageous or extravagant. The place is your world. And you — elect residents — nestle majestically above the horizon.

The Legacy, the name of a condominium complex in Longmont, north of Denver, typifies the type of names attributed to real estate today. North America situates itself in a *continuum* of human history, a lineage that goes back to its European past. As soon as the first English colonists set foot in the New World, they called their settlements after their king – Jamestown – or their home port – Plymouth⁵³. Current real estate nomenclature quite logically displays a similar inspiration, with roots to be found in its European heritage. In some instances, these references can go as far back as Ancient Greece and Rome, a neoclassical naming pattern meant to enhance the grandeur and the prestige of the properties on sale. This quest for refinement is also confirmed with the titles of nobility that developers confer to their complexes, as the thousands of *manors*, *estates*, and *chateaux* attest. Yet, the process is not to reproduce European manners or Old World conventions, but rather to find a cachet of its own. The wide range of word combinations, which seems to be essentially motivated by a constant need for renewal in order to satisfy new demands, is what asserts the nation's distinctiveness.

In borrowing European names, which are evidently chosen for their lofty, refined, and evocative values, developers have therefore succeeded in making two worlds meet, thereby creating a linguistic melting pot that gives the nation its most peculiar luster. While the free circulation of cultural representations promotes this toponymic variety that gives the names their fluidity, the market objectives gives them their glamorous tone. That the names might be dissociated from the reality they project, conjuring up a transcended physical domain, does not tarnish their significance. On the contrary, they reaffirm the necessity for this nation to place the bar as high as possible, where imagination carries the seeds of creativity, dynamics and efficiency.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ Jamestown was the first permanent English settlement in America founded in Virginia in 1607. Plymouth was established by seceding Puritans in Massachusetts in 1620.

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