

# Winter Real Estate



**THE SPORTING LIFE:** Soccer, hoops and beach access may help lure gamers to Electronic Arts' Playa Vista campus (in rendering). Occupancy begins this month.

## IN N.Y.

### Gehry's Diller deal helps spark a revival

By DULCE ZAMORA

Once New York City's manufacturing and shipping Cinderella, the lower West Side of Manhattan is showing promise in the city's push toward further renewal.

A sculpted glass and concrete structure designed by Frank Gehry will begin construction early next year in Chelsea, on 11th Avenue between West 18th and 19th Streets.

The frosted nine-story showpiece, expected to be completed in 2006, will become home to Barry Diller's InteractiveCorp. (IAC), which operates Web sites Expedia, TicketMaster and CitySearch.

IAC received \$80 million in financing from Gotham's Liberty Bond program, usually granted to projects that will help rejuvenate the city after 9/11.

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**WATER PARK:** New Hudson River Park brightens West Side.

# Vista del vidgame

## All-in-one concept lures Electronic Arts

By KATHY A. McDONALD

**T**he concept of synergy may have hobbled a few entertainment conglomerates, but real estate developers are still high on combining elements as a strategy for making multibillion-dollar investments pay off.

IN L.A.

The supersized combo is the current vogue for mega-developments. The Time Warner edifice, an office/hotel/retail/residential conglom rising above Columbus Circle in New York, is a prime example; then there's the Farmers Market in L.A., with its shopper-tainment/office space model, and the creative campus/residential/retail invention of Playa Vista on Los Angeles' Westside.

Entertainment and advertising companies that depend on highly creative types are drawn to these all-in-one spaces. For them, an amenity-filled "campus" with a decidedly non-corporate vibe is a necessity.

Major videogame developer Electronic Arts (EA) searched for some time before deciding on the Water's Edge/Playa Vista complex,

located just south of Marina del Rey. Execs wanted to expand on the creative campus concept they had developed for their Northern California headquarters.

"We've been a pioneer in creating large-scale interactive entertainment-software studios," says John Batter, general manager for Electronic Arts L.A.

The formula has worked

well for the vidgamer, producer of the popular franchises "Medal of Honor" and "Command and Conquer." EA also has large-scale game development centers in Vancouver, Canada and the U.K.

EA needed enough room to transfer 350 employees, plus space to grow and accommodate an eventual 1,000. Playa Vista seemed

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Home staging thrives in hot market.

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# Creative firms gravitating to work/play office spaces

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ideal not only for its beach-proximate Westside location (close to many post-production and F/X houses) but also for its housing options and sense of urban community.

"We believe in the concept of the work/live environment," Batter says. "There's been a tremendous interest by our employees in the housing that Playa Vista's putting up."

At least 30% of EA's current employees have checked out Playa Vista's inventory of homes, condos and apartments. Ten have already bought units and another 10 are renting. Others, like EA's senior art director, Mark Lasoff, have put deposits on units under construction.

EA has leased 250,000 square feet in adjoining buildings in the Water's Edge office complex. The canted green-glass encased Water's Edge I juts over Lincoln Boulevard, and has an unobstructed view of the restored Ballona freshwater marsh. Both buildings are being built out and outfitted by Santa Monica-based architectural firm HLW, for occupancy beginning by the end of this month.

Batter notes that it's important for the space to balance a

creative environment with the necessary technological backbone. Floor plan layouts are typical for digital media firms, including offices, team and conference rooms, and sound and video editing suites.

More unexpected are sporty extras, such as a soccer field, gym, volleyball and basketball courts. Under construction is a commissary and company store. Bike and jogging trails are close by, as are the marina and beach.

"Creative folks don't want to go into a big office tower to go dream up the next big thing," says Batter, who segued from

DreamWorks Interactive to EA.

Recreational outlets are one of the most important parts of the creative campus concept, creating an atmosphere that supports the gamer culture — less formal, less hierarchical and more fun.

Much like gamers, the editors and creative types at Ant Farm, a movie-marketing firm, work long hours under deadline.

"We're a creative company," says Mike Greenfeld, Ant Farm's co-CEO. "People who work here have idiosyncrasies. They need space to have fun in, to blow off steam."



**ANT FARM, RELOCATED:** Co-owners Mike Greenfeld, Barbara Glazer outside Ant Farm's Farmers Market space

Already ensconced in two Hollywood locations, Ant Farm needed a new office in the center of town, equidistant from studio clients, but also offering something more. At the Farmers Market, Greenfeld found 30,000 square feet of space for his 120-person firm plus other reasons to move.

"Our new space has a relaxing atmosphere and a beautiful balcony, which spreads along our first floor and is accessible from common areas," he says.

The second-floor space sits above the warehouse-sized Organized Living store across from the stalls and eateries of the Farmers Market. An important bonus for Ant Farm's employees, per Greenfeld, is the environment there and at the Grove, which offers a village-styled outdoor mall with trolleys, fountains, and live music.

Developers A.S. Gilmore Co. built the three-story glass fronted, contempo-styled office building at the Farmers Market on spec.

"Ant Farm is a prototypical client for us," says Hank Hilty, prexy of the Gilmore Co. "The building was designed and built to fit that kind of tenant." He points to the expansive patios,

ample skylights and substantial, open floorplates that give the building a creative campus feel.

Michael Beckson built out 30 edit bays for Ant Farm; many have clerestory windows, which borrow light from skylights and the building's glass front. He played with the heights and shapes of the walls to affect the audio environment, and enlivened the space with patterns created by architectural lighting.

Since 1985, his Beckson Design Associates has specialized in projects for ad agencies such as BBDO and entertainment industry clients like Paramount and Warner Bros. Studios.

Original plans for expansion of the Farmers Market site drawn up in 1985 called for a development of office, hotel, retail and affordable housing, but during the lengthy approval process, housing was eliminated from the plan. Hilty contends the city and community would now be more amenable to a residential component.

"This area has caught on with younger professional folks who want to live in an urban environment," notes Hilty. "They want to work, shop, play, and get all of that cultural energy in the same area."