



CIP Finishes Founder and President Paul Milde at the construction site of the Moxy hotel in Washington, D.C., in 2018.

Apartment Developers Are Upping the Ante

Today's apartment communities are made to attract the 21st-century workforce.

**By Paul Milde, CIP Finishes
Photographs by Hartwood Photography**

Rooftop lounges and pools. Fitness centers with yoga rooms. Zen gardens and bocce ball courts.

These might sound like features in a high-end boutique hotel, but they're quickly becoming run-of-the-mill amenities in the apartment complexes being built for today's workforce in the Greater Washington area.

My company, CIP Finishes, has furnished and installed

finishing hardware for multi-family residential communities for more than 30 years. We've come a long way since we started as Closet Interiors Plus, a custom closet installer.

That journey reflects a larger trend in our housing market and offers lessons for the Fredericksburg region as we seek to attract a high-quality workforce to support strong employers.

When I started my business, homeownership was the American dream. A big closet that could hold as many pairs of shoes, suits and dresses as a homeowner could afford was as much of a status symbol as a BMW.

When I first got into multi-family housing work, the apartment complexes all looked largely the same and the hardware we installed in them was pretty basic—doorknobs and lock sets, blinds, wire shelving, and fire extinguishers.

Since the Great Recession, apartment living has undergone a dramatic facelift.

Apartments are no longer sold as stepping stones to homeownership.

Today's apartment communities are deliberate lifestyle choices that reflect the personalities of the people who live in them.

At CIP Finishes, our bid team spends more time than ever helping builders plan for newer and better features in their amenity areas. We've helped create indoor basketball courts, dog-washing stations, bike-repair stations and mirrors in workout rooms that rival high-end health clubs and indoor bike racks that maximize small spaces by allowing bikes to be stacked in all kinds of configurations.

Technology is becoming a bigger part of the picture. In the past few years, we've begun installing backlit mirrors. The next frontier will be web-enabled mirrors that display the weather, time, news and more. Door locks have evolved from keys to key fobs, and our team is preparing for the era of smartphone-enabled locksets.

The individuals who live in these apartments are millennials, empty nesters and even families with children. All of them have a desire to spend less time commuting, less time maintaining a yard and home and more time doing things—like playing bocce ball and taking yoga classes—that say something about who they are.

In the Fredericksburg region, we'll always have fantastic single-family neighborhoods with strong homeownership. Nationwide, homeownership rates have started to bounce back a bit since their post-recession plunge. But as our region's job market grows, we need to have some products that will entice those who seek a different lifestyle.

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Installers from CIP Finishes hang motorized blinds in a fitness center at the second phase of the Modera Mosaic apartments in Fairfax County's Mosaic District.

We've seen local developers think this way. Fredericksburg's Cobblestone Square was one of the first transit-oriented multi-family communities in the region. Spotsylvania's Courthouse Village reflects the need for more neighborhoods where residents can walk to work and retail shops. The Seasons at Celebrate Virginia and Abberly at Southpoint are great examples of how today's apartment communities are being built. CIP Finishes installed and furnished finishing hardware in all of these projects.

Our perspective, seeing the detail-oriented changes in the way today's living spaces are being built, gives us a unique insight into the housing market.

The more we can create communities that people see as a reflection of their personalities, the more prepared we'll be to welcome a strong 21st-century workforce.

Paul Milde is founder and president of CIP Finishes, a specialty construction firm that furnishes and installs interior hardware in large multi-family residential, commercial and related projects in Washington, D.C., Maryland, Virginia and other regions. CIP Finishes is based in Stafford County and broke ground on its new headquarters March 2019. Learn more at www.cipfinishes.com.