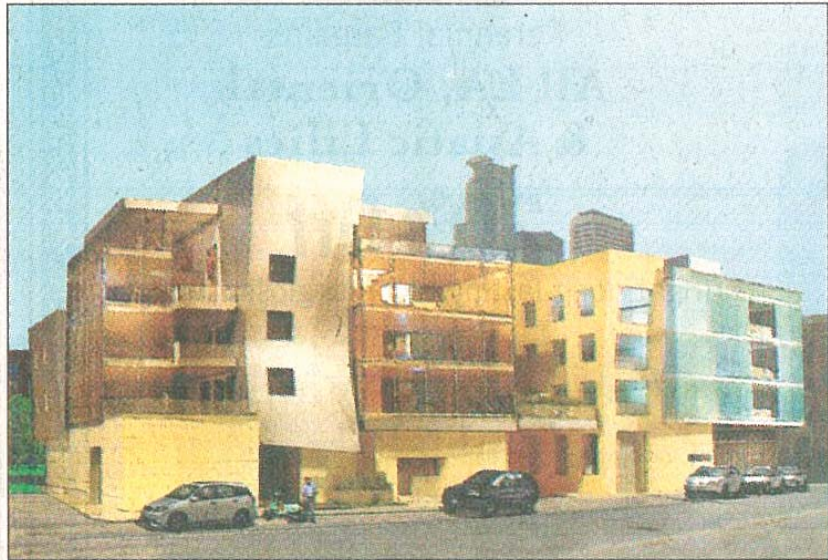


Glitzy, ritzy condos planned on Minneapolis riverfront

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By Linda Mack



Provided by James Dayton Design

Drawings of the Nine, left, and the Portland, two new condo buildings designed by James Dayton Design for near the Minneapolis riverfront.

On the historic Minneapolis riverfront, so far, new buildings have tended to look old. Now comes something dramatically different: two condo buildings of glass and curving zinc that look like the shimmery shapes of architect Frank Gehry toned down by a dose of Minnesota nice.

Minneapolis architect James Dayton, a Gehry-protege, described the two buildings he's designed for Brighton Development on S. 2nd St. and Portland Avenue as "a bit of Santa Monica style."

The riverfront boasts plenty of powerhouse architecture, from French architect Jean Nouvel's towering Guthrie Theater to the serene Mill City Museum by Minneapolis architects Meyer Scherer & Rockcastle. Condo projects such as the Stone Arch and Humboldt Lofts have won awards, too, but most borrow the boxy brick look of the area's historic buildings.

Dayton is introducing a look Minnesotans will call "different." Glass, Kasota stone and vertical zinc bands will sheath the Nine, which will hold nine high-end condos (read \$1 million and up). Glass cubes and yellow brick walls leaning out over the street will give a related but distinct look to the Portland, with 26 smaller, less pricey units (read \$300,000 to \$1 million).

"It's an interesting test of how the market values design," said Peggy Lucas of the developer, Brighton Development. "There are so many condo units on the market that people are confused. We hope that this will 'unconfuse' them."

A recent condo craze is bringing thousands of new residential units downtown. Most are encased in buildings that look like new versions of 19th-century brownstones, with brick, little entry stoops and either flat or gabled roofs. Many architects have lamented the backward-looking design ethos.

Rival architect Tom Meyer of MS&R was overjoyed at Dayton's design. "It's good for the city," he said. "It promises to up the ante for everybody."

The two-building project isn't the first time that Brighton has hired a top-rank architect. Since developing the North Star Lofts more than 10 years ago, Brighton has hired Julie Snow Architects for two projects, the award-winning Humboldt Lofts and the recently completed Park Avenue West Lofts. They've worked with MS&R on the office space in the Mill City Museum complex. The late Paul Madsen designed Brighton's first three projects, the North Star Lofts, Stone Arch Lofts and Washburn Lofts, with an eye to history.

Because those projects were in the St. Anthony Falls Historic District, the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission reviewed the designs for historic compatibility. The new condos will stand just outside the Historic District but within Minneapolis' Mill District, which has looser guidelines for new construction. The Minneapolis Planning Commission will review the project.

Next week a City Council committee will consider a land purchase agreement. There is no city financing, but the city is selling the land, now a construction staging site, to Brighton.

Tara Beard, a project manager with CPED (Community Planning and Economic Development), the city's economic arm, said she saw the innovative design as a way to help market a location that doesn't offer stunning views of either the riverfront or downtown.

"They're getting away from the brick and vinyl exterior and using more walls of glass," she said. "It's more sophisticated and modern."

Dayton said the Nine is geared to attract the same clientele as the pricey Washburn Lofts on the riverfront and 301 Kenwood near the Walker Art Center. New York-style elevators will open directly into each unit, which will occupy about 3,000 square feet on one floor. The fourth-floor unit has a "pop-up" glass penthouse on the fifth floor.

The Portland will feature 26 one- and two-bedroom units with balconies and a shared rooftop deck. Both buildings will look onto what will be a landscaped mid-block courtyard to be shared with the Park Avenue West Lofts and future live/work units planned for Washington Avenue.

Bedrooms will be in the masonry part of the buildings while the living areas will be in the glassy parts. The Mill District Master Plan requires a retail space on the corner of S. 2nd St. and Portland.

Dayton, who designed the industrial-looking Bookmen Lofts going up in the north Warehouse District, said he believes "there's a way to make a contemporary building that's an incredibly pleasant place to live and adds character."

"Not every location can pull it off," cautioned Lucas. But, she said, she thinks this corner of the riverfront can and will.