

Designing for the Future

New Trends from
an Architect
by Mark Humphreys

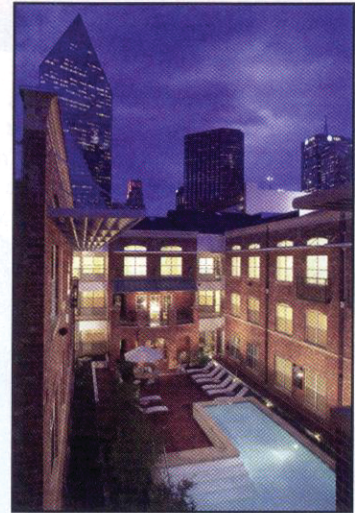


Photo credit: Steve Hinds Photography

The latest trend in multifamily housing is to create apartments that look like single-family homes, such as 1001 Ross in Dallas (above) and Glenbridge Manors in Cincinnati (below).

There are three new trends in multifamily today—condo development, condo development, and condo development. Actually, there are condos, suburban apartments, high-rise conversions, tax credit projects, and urban transit communities. If you want to understand why condos are the predominant new trend, it's fairly easy.

Absorption has switched from apartments to condos because residents have compared the price to rent vs. the price of a for-sale product. In many areas, rent costs more than to own a comparable or better place. That's why condos are hot.

In order for apartments to compete with condos, look for markets where condos aren't feasible, such as suburban areas. In these areas, condo prices are too close to single-family pricing to make any sense. Designing a



Photo credit: Wolf Photographic Arts

product that has home qualities, but is in suburbia where condos don't work, is the place to be. There are lots of markets where if you design good attached-garage product where people want to be—in a good neighborhood and a good school district—but don't want to buy a home, you'll be successful with apartments.

A project recently completed in Cincinnati offered attached garage apartments. They look like homes, but have the construction cost of an apartment. This is highly desirable, because not all people want to live in urban downtowns. But how else do you compete against single-family or condos?

Homes have big closets, garages, island kitchens, master bedrooms, and two eating areas. The apartment homes must look good and have all the amenities of a home. Many amenities are environmental things like street signs, streetlights, and individual addresses. The apartments need to look different on the outside, too. You don't see homes with the same color and elevation next to each other in a subdivision, and that holds true for home-like apartments.

The Right Density

The transit-oriented development is ideal for infill apartments. Some are suburban urban locations, and some are downtowns. The problem is how can you afford a downtown location? The ground could be \$60 to \$100 per square foot.

The right density is how you make it work. A recent development for FRAM Building Group was able to do 112 units per acre on 1.85 acres, totaling 204 units with 31,000 square feet of retail. This was accomplished by designing a two donut building with 1.5 levels of below-grade parking; the first level of parking was for retail, with the next level for residents. The donut provides views internally to a pool, or to a fireplace and fountain. It also gives a perimeter view of downtown and even partial downtown views from the courtyards.

The new trend is to get this much density—113 units per acre in 4.5 stories—by doing a mezzanine and complete underground parking. The construction cost of \$85 per square foot net rentable was very reasonable.

If these densities and prices don't meet the need, then high-rise condos are the way to go. Recently, we designed The



Grant Park in Minneapolis, Minn., is a 27-story, 330-unit development that was staged in four areas: townhomes, tower, garage, and staging/final phase.

Carlyle, a 27-story high-rise with 250 units on one acre in Minneapolis, Minn. Construction costs were very high, even for a condo, so we recommended tunnel form construction, another new trend. The tunnel form is a mechanized form that is a stronger, faster, and cheaper structural system.

The reason why everyone isn't using it is flexibility. Unlike a post tension slab, a tunnel form requires a rigid wall system, and standard looking apartments. At The Carlyle, intentional curves in the non-concrete walls, large open interiors, as well as at the exterior corners, were used to deceive the eye into believing it's a non-tunnel form building.

A roof garden was placed on top of the parking deck to further hide the parking garage, which has been covered by retail and apartments. Some believe you have to do the same apartments all the way up with tunnel form construction. However, at The Carlyle, three different sets of units were used starting at the base, midpoint, and penthouses. This building also is following the trend to a progressive retro style. The look is similar

to a nearby post office building in the art deco style.

How High Can You Go?

When building a high-rise, it's important to watch costs. At another high-rise project, Grant Park in Minneapolis, a 27-story, 330-unit development, several new trends were introduced. Construction of the project was staged in four areas—townhomes, tower, garage, and staging/final phase.

By staging construction, you can move the construction sequence much easier and deliveries work well. Grant Park delivered the townhomes much earlier than the tower, because they were low-rise and in Phase I. The tower was unique not only because the building emulated an old hotel, but the skin appears to be all brick and cast stone. It actually was all pre-cast made to look like brick and stone; this allowed for much cheaper construction costs and quicker build times.

The most significant design trend on this building was the copyrighted high-rise



The Carlyle, a 27-story high-rise building in Minneapolis, Minn., used tunnel form construction to help make the construction process faster and cheaper. The 250-unit community offers residents a landscape rooftop deck with pool, garden, barbeque areas, and an open air fireplace.



Even though Grant Park was a post-tension slab building, these and other items (pre-cast, efficient floor plans, and phasing) kept costs down.

design (no corridor) dubbed the “Home-Rise.” Using a design that has two elevator lobbies and a fire corridor, the building eliminated the look of a 140 foot long corridor. Instead, there are two 30-foot elevator lobbies. This not only was \$6 million cheaper, but looked better and created 12 million more sellable square feet at no additional cost. The building is 89 percent efficient on a floor basis.

The townhomes were unique because they hid the garage and were stacked, allowing entrance from the street or the garage from your personal parking space. Hiding the parking garage with units is definitely a new trend. The garage also was enclosed because of the harsh Minneapolis winters; this resulted in parking space sale prices around \$25,000—more than double what they cost to build.

Wanted: Affordable Housing

Another long-lasting trend is family tax credit projects. The primary difference between tax credit projects and regular apartments is they are designed for families needing affordable housing. They have lots of amenities.

These properties are loaded up with computer rooms, day care centers, and play areas. Outside, there are large jungle gyms, sandboxes, and pool areas. The trend also is to make the development look very nice. Many of the community buildings are designed with better materials and are as nice or nicer than their luxury counterparts. Why? To compete against market-rate projects.

The latest affordable multifamily trend is military housing. Today, military personnel want to get out of the service because they don't like the housing provided for them; many don't want to raise a family in this type of housing.

The trend is to provide multifamily and single-family housing like the private sector, but designed as a community for families. There is no better feeling than replacing World War II housing with housing that we would all want to live in for our troops and their families. **pro**

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The tower in Grant Park was designed with two elevator lobbies and a fire corridor to eliminate the look of a 140 foot long corridor.

