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First look: Why the new 405 Colorado tower looks so different

Like art on display at a museum, a pedestal of parking holds up a shiny office tower

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The Durham, North Carolina-based architecture firm known for designing Austin's Frost Bank Tower has designed another uniquely shaped tower that will change the downtown skyline.

The early renderings of the 25-story 405 Colorado tower, designed by Duda Paine Architects, received a lot of attention for its unconventional design. As the tower is expected to reach a major milestone in August — construction will top out — the mastermind behind the tower, Turan Duda, co-founding principal of Duda Paine, is explaining his inspiration and giving a first look at new renderings.



DUDA PAINE ARCHITECTS

While the tower couldn't scrape the sky because of site limitations, Duda said he had to get creative to make 405 Colorado "stand out in a crowd."

The tower was inspired by the work of modern French-Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi, who made simple sculptures out of marble, limestone, bronze and wood from the 1910s through the 1940s, he said.

Brancusi "came to the realization that the sculpture he was carving, ... when he put it on the pedestal, the pedestal became a part of the art," Duda said. "Unifying pedestal and sculptural into one form was really the inspiration for us."

As a part of that, Duda didn't attempt to hide 405 Colorado's parking garage like most other downtown Austin towers. Instead, the parking pedestal will be clad in a "warm terracotta-like material," he said. It will have an earthy tone that will fit in with other traditional brick

buildings still standing in Austin's warehouse district, which is now a hodgepodge of stores, restaurants, night clubs and offices.

On top of the pedestal will be the crystalline, glass sculpture that serves as the office space in the tower, Duda said. The faceted glass reflects "all of the different facets of the sky."

Developed by Philadelphia-based Brandywine Realty Trust, 405 Colorado is slated for completion in the first quarter of 2021. After losing its anchor tenant — global law firm DLA Piper — to construction delays in the first quarter, the tower is 18% leased, meaning about 160,000 square feet is still available. AB Private Credit Investors has leased about 13,000 square feet on the 18th floor. About 3,665 square feet of retail space is slated for the ground floor.

Troy Holme, Katie Ekstrom and Casey Ford of CBRE Group Inc. are handling leasing of the office space.

Brandywine hired Duda Paine to design a tower that would be "cool and different" and accretive to the Austin skyline, said Bill Redd, senior managing director of Brandywine in Austin and Washington, D.C.

In Austin, Duda Paine has also designed the Dimensional Fund Advisors building at Palisades West, Colorado Tower at West Third and Colorado streets, and the yet-to-be built Republic Tower at 401 W. Fourth St.

405 Colorado has many unique features, according to the architect.

The ground floor lobby is designed to resemble an art gallery, Duda said. A wall of the lobby will be pixelated cloudscape crafted from glass mosaic tiles; renderings also show floating abstract sculptures of people. Works from artists like Rene Magritte and Chuck Close were some of the inspiration.

Between the parking pedestal and office tower is the sky lounge and terrace on the 14th floor — about 140 feet above the ground. The floor-to-ceiling windows can be opened to let in fresh air. The elevators are on the north side of the building rather than in the core. Both the elevators and the sky lounge will be lit up at night and are "designed to feel like an event," Duda said.

While providing amenities such as a café for morning coffee or afternoon cocktails and a fitness center, this floor will serve as a way station for both tenants and visitors will offer a variety of meeting spaces.

Post-Covid, this floor will be even more important as it controls access to the building's offices and has separate HVAC and filtration system, Duda said. Tenants can have meeting with guests on the 14th floor rather than bringing them into their offices.

"It is by the luck of the draw that we designed it this way," he said.

Additionally, elevators will take visitors from the street level lobby or the parking garage to the 14th floor. Separate elevators from the 14th floor will be taken by tenants to reach their offices.

The interiors were designed by Austin-based STG Design.

JE Dunn Construction is the general contractor for the tower and Stantec Inc. (NYSE: STN) is the engineer.

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