

In Texas, even arts districts are supersize



Located just north of the city center, the Dallas Arts District, established in 1983, spreads across 68 acres, or 19 blocks – making it the largest of its kind in the nation. Beyond its impressive size, it boasts I.M. Pei's Meyerson Symphony Center (1989) and Renzo Piano's Nasher Sculpture Center (2003).

Now, it's about to get a few more buildings by architectural heavyweights. Work is under way on the Center for the Performing Arts, which will feature venues by Norman Foster and Rem Koolhaas, along with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM). Once this \$338 million undertaking is complete, the Dallas arts neighborhood will be the only place in the world where people can see the work of four Pritzker Prize winners (Pei, Piano, Foster, and Koolhaas) within a single district.

The Center for the Performing Arts will consist of three major buildings woven together by a 10-acre park designed by the French landscape architect Michel Desvigne, with the Chicago-based firm JJR. Foster + Partners' 234,000-square-foot Winspear Opera House calls for a 2,200-seat auditorium contained within a cylindrical volume covered in red-tinted glass. A trellislike canopy extends from the auditorium on all sides, shading an outdoor performance area.

The 600-seat, 80,000-square-

Work is under way on a new performing arts center for the 68-acre Dallas Arts District (above).

foot Wyly Theater was designed, initially, by Koolhaas's Office of Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) and was taken over by REX, founded in 2006 by OMA alums Joshua Prince-Ramus and Erez Ella. The design programmatically reshuffles typical horizontal theater layouts into a 12-level vertical expression, placing front-of-house and back-of-house areas above and below the auditorium, rather than around it.

SOM's City Performance Hall is organized as a series of sloping parallel concrete bands of varying heights and widths. Each band contains a single performance venue,

IT WILL FEATURE VENUES BY FOUR PRITZKER WINNERS: PEI, PIANO, FOSTER, AND KOOLHAAS.

which design partner Leigh Breslau, AIA, says will create easy-to-navigate circulation paths meant to aid the 70 groups that will use the building. As the only project in the center that is city-funded and dependent on bonds, Breslau says he designed it to be built, as financing permits, one section at a time, as a "continuous ribbon" that still maintains design coherence.

The center is not the only new addition to the arts district. A 170,000-square-foot expansion,

Austin's tallest building halfway there

At 680 feet tall, the Austonian, designed by Houston-based firm Ziegler Cooper Architects, will be the tallest building in Austin when it's completed in 2010. Additionally, the developer is seeking a four-star rating for the tower under the Austin Energy Green Building Program, equivalent to a LEED Gold rating from the USGBC.

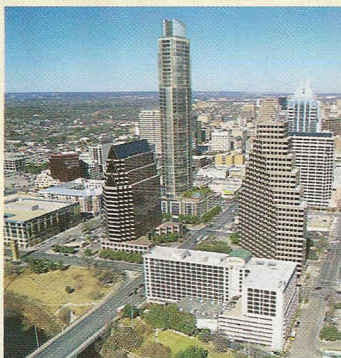
Currently at the halfway point, the elliptical, 56-story steel, aluminum, concrete, glass, and limestone-clad building will add to Austin's skyline a somewhat softer (and less controversial) top than the pointy ends of the current highest building, the 515-foot, 33-floor Frost Bank Tower, built in 2003 by Duda/Paine Architects and HKS and sometimes referred to as

"giant nose-hair clippers."

According to Scott Ziegler, the Austonian's design principal, the illuminated zenith of the new building will resemble a "lamp of knowledge" – a nod to the prominence of Austin's University of Texas. "We didn't know when we started how tall it would be," says Ziegler. "But we knew that to encourage density downtown, Mayor Will Wynn had lifted the 8-to-1 floor-to-area (FAR) ratios and that negotiations were in progress to go as high as we could. The Austonian's FAR is 18-to-1."

The mayor's stated plan in 2006 was to get 25,000 people living downtown – discouraging sprawl and attracting retail and hospitality to the city's core. It has worked to some extent. With around 10 downtown high-rise condo projects in the works, Austin is poised to either gain a vibrant city center, or be stuck with a glut of empty units.

As for the Austonian, with the smallest units, at 1,200 square feet, starting at \$559,000 and more than 100 units selling for more than \$1 million, it remains to be seen if the country's stunted economy will keep tenants from filling Austin's mightiest tower. *Ingrid Spencer*



The Austonian will be 680 feet tall.

designed by Allied Works, to the Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts – a longtime presence in the neighborhood – was completed last

synergies in the middle of sprawl-laden Dallas. Arts-district boosters say that having a public high school helps make the area an active community; housing and retail development should also prevent the district from becoming a cultural ghetto that empties out when the theaters are dark. But Cloepfil says it might be misguided to expect Jane Jacobs-style urbanism to sprout in north Texas, and that isn't necessarily a bad thing. Dallas might have to accept the arts district as a successful destination, not a way of life. "I'm trying to be a realist to other urban types," he says. "I do think there are other models of urban success that we may not want to believe are successful." *Zach Mortice*

June. Firm principal Brad Cloepfil, AIA, planned the addition as a series of masonry-clad interlocking bars, each dedicated to a particular curriculum. The earthy, industrial presentation of materials suggests artists' lofts, and in fact, Cloepfil says he thinks of the building in a "factory context" because "that's where artists are made."

Many hope the district will evolve into a pedestrian neighborhood of mixed uses and artistic

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