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Devon tower architect draws inspiration from area

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Business Writers

The Proposed 54-story Devon Tower will be one of the tallest skyscrapers west of the Mississippi, but its lead designer, Jon Pickard, looked to the neighboring 11-story Colcord Hotel for much of his inspiration.



"One of the key founders of skyscraper design, in fact, the gentleman responsible for much of the Colcord's terra cotta design, is the architect Louis Sullivan," Pickard said. "And when Mr. Sullivan spoke of a skyscraper, he preferred the skyscraper as where every inch should be a proud and soaring thing — that it should, with great exaltation, reach to the sky without a dissenting line."

Pickard's design attempts just that, even as he also looked to other components in the downtown Oklahoma City skyline, including First National Tower. The 33-story tower, built in 1931, inspired the planned Devon Tower's diamond-shaped faces at the very top.

The tower will have a three-sided footprint so that it will have no back door and can be viewed in the round from all points in Oklahoma City.

"A skyscraper has a different attitude," Pickard said. "It is an attitude that embraces issues beyond just the pure, rational solutions to a problem. It looks at how a building fits into the city, and what it says about public values."

To that extent, Pickard said, yet another downtown icon, the Crystal Bridge at the Myriad Gardens, influenced the round, glass rotunda with a visible steel superstructure that will serve as a key entry for employees and visitors.

Pickard calls the rotunda, 100 feet high and 100 feet across, the heart of not just the new Devon Tower, but perhaps all of downtown.

"You have a tough climate," Pickard said. "And we need to compensate for that. This space will rise up 120 feet and will allow people to come together."

Pickard said the rotunda is designed to welcome outsiders who might want to use it for public gatherings or simply to cross through from Harvey Avenue to the Myriad Gardens. Restaurants and shops will call the area home, similar to what exists with the atrium at Leadership Square.

When people will look up at the glass rotunda, they will see not just a skylight, but also walkways connecting to the tower.

The rotunda is part of a six-story "podium" that stretches west to Hudson Avenue. Just the podium alone would be a significant addition to downtown. Designed at 400,000 square feet, the building will house auditoriums, classrooms and offices and is almost as big as Chase Tower or the former Kerr-McGee Tower.

Pickard said the podium and the tower itself are designed to provide open views for a 2.5-acre park that will front Sheridan Avenue and the Colcord Hotel.

The roof of the podium likely will be lined with plantings that will capture rainwater and allow it to slowly seep back into the city's storm sewer system.

"What you can see we have not done is create a big, high-rise corporate building that was surrounded by security and did not embrace the city," Nichols said. "In fact, what we have done is to create exactly the opposite — a building that surely houses our employees, but down at the ground level, where citizens work, eat and dine, it is wide open to the public. ... We tried to design a building that embraces the city and is open to its citizens to enjoy as much as possible."

