

Barry enlists Pickard Chilton for big-time tower

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The reaction was quick and clear.

Seemingly minutes after a rendering of proposed skyscraper The Bass Berry & Sims Tower (a working name at this early stage) was released to the Nashville media last week, numerous posters on the local forum of urbanplanet.org offered overwhelmingly positive response to the design.

In contrast, no more than two forum members offered criticism, contending the design of the SoBro tower, work on which is slated to begin by October, could be monolithic and fail to fully activate the street.

Of note, one of those sourpusses doesn't even live in Nashville. Why the man even cares much that the city will have by 2010 a building he finds uninspired in design is baffling. If not laughable.

The impressions of the other posters, at least 20 people by my count (full disclosure, some of these people are personal friends) range on the excitement meter from "this will be a very cool building" to "this baby will be one of the most striking high-rises in the entire country."

The fact that a bunch of built environment geeks are receptive to the proposed design of an as-yet-built skyscraper, quite frankly, means about as much as recent media reports predicting Billy Donovan would leave his coaching seat at Florida and bolt for Kentucky.

Still, many of these high-rise enthusiasts know their stuff. And, perhaps most importantly, they can appreciate the significance of having high-profile out-of-towners — Atlanta-based developer Barry Real Estate Companies and architect Pickard Chilton of New Haven, Conn. — undertake a major project in a part of downtown Nashville that only five years ago was as enticing to developers as this chinless, pasty-skinned, neurotic middle-aged writer would be to a crop of Miss USA contestants.

Let's just lay it on the line. Barry is a rising star in the development world. The company is fully immersed in a nine-block, 11-building downtown Atlanta development called Allen Plaza. The price tag? A cool \$2 billion.

In addition, Pickard Chilton, the project's design architect and in business only since 1997, is designing wickedly modern 21st century buildings.

Are there more prestigious entities in either industry? Of course. But locals should be thrilled to have both companies putting a stamp on SoBro.

Equally exciting, Nashville's own Everton Oglesby Architects will serve as the architect of record, primarily handling later-phase work on the tower.

Last week, I talked to Deming Fish at Barry. The company is determined, he says, to give Nashville a "timeless" building.

"Bass Berry gets a tremendous amount of credit, as they pushed us and expected a world-class and iconic design," Fish notes diplomatically.

Not sure the design of the BB&S Tower is truly world class, but there is no question the high-rise — to be clad overwhelmingly in tinted glass and with a distinctive cap comprised of four curved walls — will be quite striking and one of the sleekest in the Southeast. At 435 futuristic feet, it should contrast, almost wildly so, with the dignified Schermerhorn Symphony Center next door.

As to Pickard (pronounced Pick-ARD) Chilton, these folks mean business. With all due respect to the architecture firms based in Nashville, none has undertaken such eye-popping projects in far-flung locales. For example, Pickard has left its design stamp on hyper-contemporary buildings in Atlanta, Houston, Kuala Lumpur and Montreal.

Furthermore, firm founder Jon Pickard, while with Cesar Pelli & Associates, helped oversee the design of The Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the world's tallest buildings when they were completed in 1998.

"It is fair to say that Pickard Chilton is an internationally recognized firm for high-rise design," says Gary Overton of EOA.

Actually, there are only two other architecture companies with such high-rise pedigrees and that have completed work in Nashville: Chicago's Kohn Pedersen Fox Architects (what is now Fifth Third Center), and Cambridge, Mass.-based The Stubbins Associates (Nashville City Center).

No doubt, Barry deserves much credit for enlisting Pickard Chilton and EOA. And landing as its anchor tenant Bass Berry & Sims — as respected a law firm as you will find in town — is also noteworthy.

Interestingly, five years ago, Barry attempted, yet failed, to lure another law firm as lead tenant for a building that never materialized.

As Fish notes, "Nashville is a market we've been desirous to be in."

You're in it now, Barry.

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