

Modern projects set tone for future of SoBro neighborhood

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Turning a neighborhood around doesn't happen overnight. It's a long campaign, waged block by block, and few individual projects redefine an area by themselves.

But it's quickly becoming clear exactly what the character of SoBro, the neighborhood south of Broadway, is going to be. The groundbreaking of the Pinnacle at Symphony Place office building earlier this month and the topping out of the Encore condo tower last week — both under construction at Third Avenue South and Demonbreun Street — are proof that modern buildings have won out and that SoBro's gritty, industrial look is doomed.

It wasn't always obvious that this would be the case. SoBro may lie just a few blocks from downtown, with its glass-fronted office buildings, but it is separated from the central business district by Lower Broadway and its low-slung brick bars and shops, many of which have stood for close to a century.

Some wanted SoBro to be an extension of that. They argued for a low-density neighborhood that would unfurl south to Rolling Mill Hill and west to the Gulch. Others wanted SoBro to become a new downtown, where residents and office workers in high-rises could overlook Nashville's central neighborhood and the river.

Encore developer Tony Giarratana argued for the latter. He won, but not before knocking three stories off his high-rise to pacify opponents. It now stands at 20 stories, or 220 feet.

"Being first, we ran into all the questions with the city and the city planners as to what do we want SoBro to be," Giarratana said, recalling the review process that ended 16 months ago.

Opposition softens

By the time Atlanta-based Barry Real Estate Cos. proposed the Pinnacle, a 28-story tower, the idea of a high-rise in SoBro was no longer shocking. After a three-month pause to rewrite SoBro's height rules, the project sailed through its city review.

The people behind both projects said they took their cues from the Schermerhorn Symphony Center. The architecture is different: The Schermerhorn is classical, while both the Pinnacle and the Encore are modern. But like the two towers, the Schermerhorn has a solid, glassy look — not retro bricks and mortar.

It was probably inevitable that this would be the direction SoBro would take. A decade before last year's debate over the Encore, the Sommet Center, with its swoops and curves, and the new Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, with its music-inspired design, set a tone that was decidedly modern.

Now several developers are working on plans for the next building in the area. If the last few projects are any guide, expect it to be something modern that will leave a mark not just on SoBro but also on the city as a whole.

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