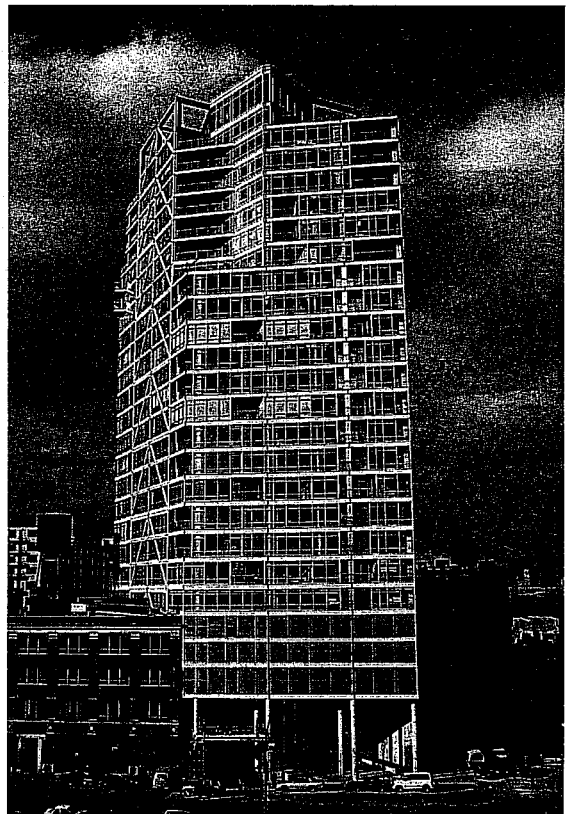


Museum Tower IV, designed by Pappageorge / Haymes



Erle on the Park, designed by Lucien Lagrange

# Architects dish

*Six top Chicago architects discuss residential design, hot trends, pet peeves and local buildings they love*

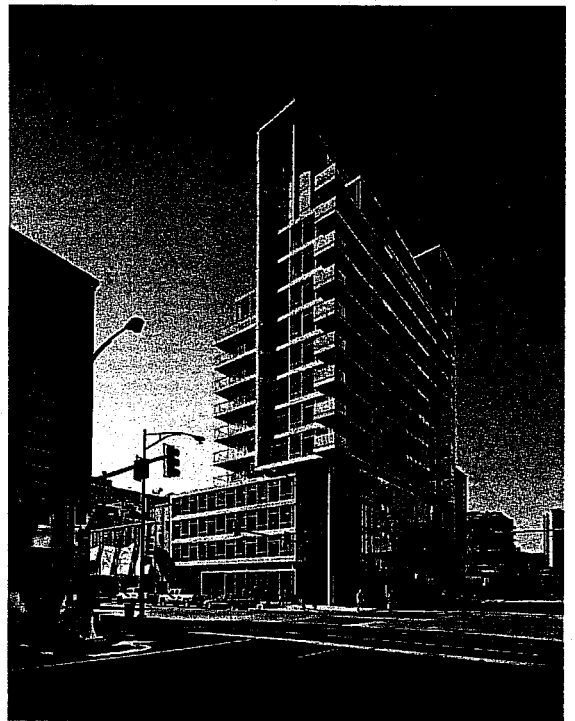
by Alison Soltau

For a while there, it was no fun talking to Chicago's top residential architects. It's not that they bored us — they're among the most interesting people you'll ever meet — but they were prone to complaints. They complained about developers who refused to build anything interesting, about the buyers who settled for bland buildings, about the bankers who wouldn't finance anything perceived as risky and about the brokers who promoted the idea that only vintage-looking designs could sell in Chicago.

There were good reasons for the architects' grumbling, but even well-reasoned, articulate complaints from the intellectuals who, literally, shape our city, grow old quickly.

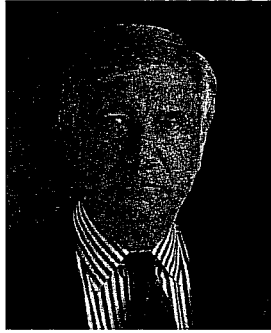
My, how times have changed. Today, Chicago architects are brimming with optimism and kind words. Innovation and creativity are back, and though there's no shortage of mediocre designs, plenty of beautiful, smart residential projects are on the drawing board or under construction. Chicago architects again have the opportunity to display this town's considerable design talent, and they even, on occasion, have nice things to say about each other's work.

The zeitgeist has changed to such a degree that we decided to let you listen in directly on our conversations and hear about the latest residential architecture in the best way possible — from the mouths of architects.



Contemporaine, designed by Ralph Johnson, of Perkins & Will

*continued on page 38*



# Lucien Lagrange

## Lucien Lagrange Architects

Parisian-born architect Lucien Lagrange is known for classical high-end buildings as well as cutting-edge designs, such as Erie on the Park and Kingsbury on the Park. Current projects include X/O, Ten East Delaware and The Ritz-Carlton Residences.



X/O Condominiums

**NH:** What was your vision for the upcoming South Loop high-rise development, X/O Condominiums?

**LL:** We wanted this tower to have an impact on the skyline. It will be very visible from Lake Shore Drive as you're driving north and as you emerge from the bridge at McCormick Place, you'll see the two towers and the new [Soldier Field] stadium, which has a very modern and classical look. The towers have to address this location, and with two towers, we could create a composition you could read in the sky. Right away I thought about the movement and tempo of Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* because it's very exciting and has tension. The towers come together and when you look farther up, they come apart. It's like dancing a tango. You have your hand on the back of the woman, then your torso moves away, you link hips. There is sexual tension and it's moving forth and back. They are clad in glass; they are going to

reflect the sky in their skin. The skin is very sensual in a way. It's like it's a dress.

**NH:** How does X/O Condominiums respond to its South Loop surroundings?

**LL:** We're bringing the 21st century to the South Loop, which I don't think has been done with other buildings. They are pretty good but they are more of the same. They are pretty mundane. The real criticism we faced was why have a modern building so close to the Prairie Avenue Historical District? Glessner House is a landmark now, but at the time it was built it was a very avant-garde building. It was breaking new ground, and in a way, we're doing the same thing. We pick up from [Glessner House architect Henry Hobson] Richardson. It's not a location to put a classical building... I don't want to do a bad Glessner House; I'm not as good as Richardson.

**NH:** Tell me about the interior of

X/O Condominiums.

**LL:** Every floor is different because of the shape of the building. We've created almost 200 different apartments, and we're responding to the 21st century lifestyle. It's more open, with a smaller kitchen, bigger bathroom and more closet space. People don't cook anymore; the lady's not going to slave in the kitchen.

**NH:** Is residential architecture entering a new era in Chicago?

**LL:** I think we are. Six or eight years ago, we saw painted concrete buildings, one after the other. People were putting up those buildings, making money and going to the bank. I would say that the movement toward good architecture started three or four years ago. There was Erie on the Park and Kingsbury on the Park — they were the very first modern buildings. They were really good. Do you know who the architect is? Today what has happened, which is good, is that its very competi-

tive, and it's not a fad; it's a direction.

**NH:** Do you see any dominant architectural trends?

**LL:** There is definitely a trend to more modern, contemporary buildings, but on the other hand, people are doing classical buildings. Ten East Delaware is a classical Beaux Arts building. We do live in a very eclectic society with very different lifestyles that are all valid...

**NH:** Do you have any architectural pet peeves or buildings you admire?

**LL:** Some buildings are background buildings. They don't tell you any-

thing and they don't move you. But there are some that are just "wow" that you feel good, like the Monadnock Building in the Loop... Another building I've always loved is The Blackstone because it's a beautiful roof, a big, strong, powerful mansard roof.

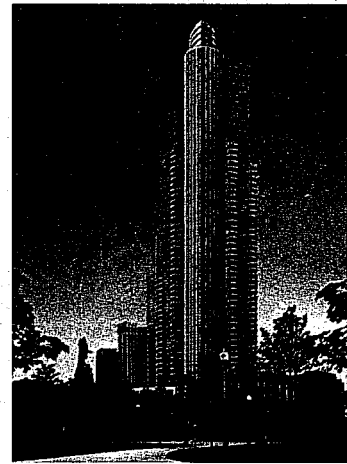
**NH:** What can we expect to see from you in the near future?

**LL:** I've designed a development for the Columbus Hospital site [Lincoln Park 2520]. It's three towers facing the lake with 300 units, and it's a high-end market. I'm also looking at doing a building on LaSalle Street, a hotel.

# George Pappageorge

## Pappageorge / Haymes

George Pappageorge is a principal in Pappageorge / Haymes, the architecture firm he founded with David Haymes. The firm's current designs include Park Michigan, Emerald and Museum Park, a campus of 12 towers and counting in the South Loop's Central Station development.



One Museum Park

**NH:** What was the vision for Museum Park?

**GP:** A master plan had already been devised and one of the challenges was how to transition from the townhouses that were already built at the southern end of Museum Park at Central Station to the 650-foot-tall modern high-rises along Grant Park at the northern end of Museum Park. We also wanted to create an architectural vocabulary that took some identity from the Museum Campus across Lake Shore Drive. Museum Towers I, II and III are traditional in the sense that they have a base, middle and top. They have exposed concrete frames that are articulated to respond to the classical architectural vocabulary of cornices, columns, classical proportions and details.

Tower IV [1255 S. Prairie Private] becomes the transition point. Tower IV has an expressed concrete frame that perpetuates the notion of a base,

a middle and a top, greatly simplified, and flanking the frame are expanses of curved glass curtain walls, which instill the modern idiom, preparing for the 650-foot tall buildings along Roosevelt Road.

**NH:** How did you consider the skyline and Grant Park when you designed the newest high-rises on Roosevelt Road?

**GP:** We knew we had to frame the southern edge of Grant Park along Roosevelt Road in order to balance the north wall of high-rises along Millennium Park. Now the park will be framed like Central Park in New York.

One Museum Park East and One Museum Park West, along Roosevelt Road, are very glassy and expressive. One East has a unique massing, where the center of the building rises to the highest point then drops down, creating a dramatic effect. The floor plans of both buildings al-

low every unit to have lake and park views, capturing vistas from Soldier Field to Millennium Park. We did this with a modified single-loaded corridor format, where the elevators and corridor are at the back of the building, rather than down the center, so that the units have an orientation to the north and the east.

**NH:** What challenges do "mega-projects" pose?

**GP:** The complexity of adding towers as you move on in the process became more restrictive due to the fact that we were trying to create protected views for the new towers, while protecting the views of the towers we had already completed. For example, Tower IV had to not stick out too far, so it wouldn't block the views of Tower III...

**NH:** What other projects is Pappageorge / Haymes working on?

**GP:** Park Michigan is an 80-story tower that's really situated at 9 [S.]

Wabash Avenue, but the Michigan Avenue entrance is through the historic YWCA building. It will be the ninth tallest building in Chicago. It's a needle; it's so sleek. It will be less than 8,000 square feet per floor, whereas the average building is 12,000 square feet per floor. Its column, curtain wall and canopy have a Miesian quality.

**NH:** What's an architectural "pet peeve" for you?

**GP:** When buildings don't reach the

ground properly, but sit on top of a parking garage. Parking garages rarely contribute in a positive way to creating a lively and vibrant streetscape.

**NH:** Name a building by another architect that you admire.

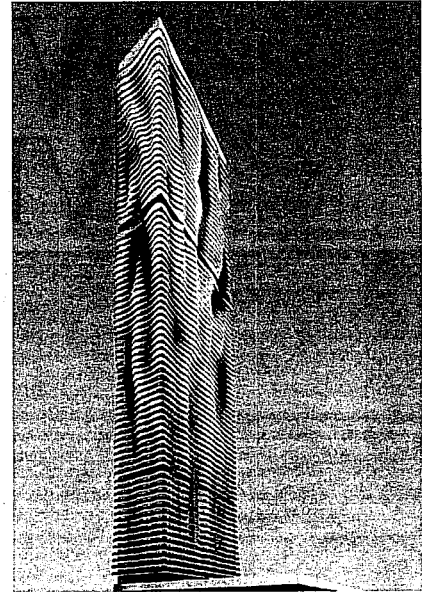
**GP:** The Contemporaine by Ralph Johnson. I like how the building has been subdivided volumetrically into an interesting composition. The dynamic of the forms creates an impact that is much stronger than the scale of the building itself.



# Jeanne Gang

## Studio / Gang / Architects

Jeanne Gang's debut residential high-rise, Aqua, was designed for Lakeshore East with architect of record Loewenberg Architects. Gang and Mark Schendel are principals of Studio / Gang / Architects, which was founded in 1997.



Aqua

**NH:** What was your vision for Aqua?

**JG:** The exterior of it is really shaped by the response to different view corridors and landmarks in the city. It's a tall building, so the upper floors have amazing views with no effort at all. But when you think about a building in the city, it's not a blank slate. We shaped the building to respond to those other buildings. The floor slabs reach out and capture views that you would not normally get. The floor slabs that create this three-dimensionality change very gradually over the length of the building, so it ends up having the appearance of very water-worn rocks.

With the terrace that we've provided you can really occupy the space that's part of the façade and part of the city. They are all different sizes, some are very large, some medium, some less of a terrace -- more of a Juliet balcony. People can pick what

suits their lifestyle.

The location of Aqua puts you right on a park and a lakefront. They'll have a pool and other outdoor activities areas like a fire pit where you can gather and have cookouts, and an indoor lap pool.

**NH:** Aqua is your first residential high-rise project. In the past, you've designed institutional buildings ranging from museums to a community amphitheater. How did your background influence Aqua?

**JG:** We did bring something new to it. Our team is part of a younger generation that likes to have simplicity and access to the outdoors. At our office we have an outdoor courtyard even though we're on the second floor, and we use it all the time. Everyone in our office who worked on this project would love to live there. We made it what we wanted it to be. In all of our work, we're looking for that place where you bring the out-

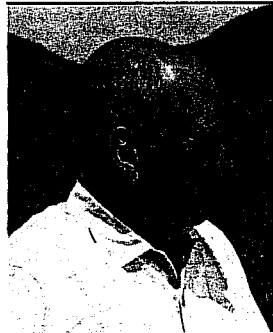
doors in, or bring the indoors out. When we designed the amphitheater at the Starlight Theater [in Rockford], we gave it a kinetic roof that opens up to the stars in fair weather.

**NH:** Is there a distinctly Chicago style of architecture?

**JG:** One thing that ties us together would be our response to this climate that is particular to Chicago. In this climate, we're trying to capture the southern sun in winter. We're trying to do more natural ventilation, so you use air conditioning less and capture some of the renewable energy. Those are all things that are going to start to show up in future architecture in Chicago.

**NH:** As a younger architect do you think Chicago has a bright architectural future?

**JG:** There is a buzz. There are more students coming here upon graduation because there are some good buildings being built.



# David Hovey

## Optima, Inc.

New Zealand-born architect David Hovey teaches at IIT and is president and founder of Optima, Inc., which designs and builds homes and residential communities in Arizona and Chicagoland, including prominent pieces of Evanston's mini-skyline.

**NH:** What was the philosophy behind the design of your current project, Old Orchard Woods, in Skokie?

**DH:** It's obviously a very contemporary building and because it's a site that has views of the forest preserve and downtown Chicago, it has a diverse shape to the building. It's arranged in three components that are joined together and arranged at right angles to each other around a very large quadrangle. Instead of the building being one continuous surface, it has cutouts that sometimes are five stories high. Those holes or voids of the building add a kind of relief to the exterior surface and allow light to penetrate it.

It's a glass and extruded aluminum curtain wall construction. Many of the units are on the corners of the building and because of its diverse shape, it creates lots of corners with very spectacular views and interior

light. Instead of the units being narrow and deep, the units have a lot of exterior surface. The floor plans take advantage of the corners of the building to create kitchens, in some cases, which have floor-to-ceiling glass.

The building also has very extensive green roof terrace areas. As the building steps up and down, the horizontal terraces are fully landscaped...

It's a 690-unit building and by bringing people together in an efficient way, you can do some spectacular things. On the top floor penthouse level we have three different fitness centers with outdoor landscape space with fantastic views of the lake, downtown Chicago and the forest preserves.

**NH:** What are the pros and cons of being both the architect and the developer of a project?

**DH:** It's very conducive to distinguished design. Since I am an architect, my main passion, my life, is ar-

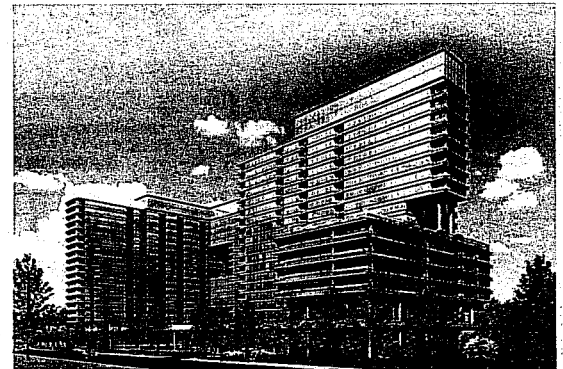
chitecture, so, of course, quality of design is extremely important. The design probably is not compromised in any way because we don't have anybody else telling us what the design should be. We buy land, build it and market it. There are certain efficiencies and advantages that can be passed on to the buyers.

**NH:** What's your opinion of the quality of architecture in Chicago?

**DH:** Some buildings in the last few years have been driven by cost more than design excellence in Chicago.

You have to, as an architect and developer, make a commitment to doing something better. There is some very good competitive architecture in Chicago and I'd like to see more of that, but you can't say that about all the projects built in Chicago over the last few years.

When we build a building with expansive green roof areas and outdoor landscaped areas that doesn't



Optima Old Orchard

cost less money; that costs more money, and the advantages to the community are quite significant because thousands of pounds of oxygen are created by green roofs.

The better the design and architecture, the better the chance the public will recognize it, and it will help sales.

**NH:** What are your architectural dislikes?

**DH:** I don't like seeing "applied decoration," where you take a 21st century building and you try to make it

look historic or decorative. Imagine taking something that was meaningful to a past society and trying to put it on a building today. I think it's inappropriate to do that just for decoration's sake. This is an extreme example, but you wouldn't put gargoyles on a 21st century building. I think the architectural beauty of the building should come from the inherent quality of the materials and the proportions of the building and how you're composing architectural components.



# David Brininstool

## Brininstool & Lynch

David Brininstool founded the firm of Brininstool & Lynch with Brad Lynch in 1989. Current residential projects include the high-rises 550 St. Clair, 535 St. Clair and 1720 S. Michigan.

**NH:** What influenced the design for 550 St. Clair?

**DB:** Brininstool & Lynch has always been positioned as pursuing modern development and modern design, and we developed our reputation doing custom residences. The idea with 550 St. Clair was to take these ideas and really exploit them with the same approach we would take to a custom residence. We presented this idea to multiple clients, and they were not quite ready for that step. Five-fifty St. Clair is in Streeterville, which is a more sophisticated, upscale audience, and there was more openness to a building that emphasizes building design.

The unit plans were really what drove the project, and other elements were selected or developed to best serve or optimize the unit plans. We created sliding panels at the outer walls to allow rooms to open up or close off. A separate bedroom can op-

erate more as a media room or a natural extension of the main living space.

When we did the kitchens we wanted them to be pieces that are seamlessly integrated into the architecture, so we have appliances integrated behind the cabinetry fronts, and they read more like cabinetry or furniture, rather than dropping a conventional kitchen into the living room. For people leading a downtown lifestyle, who are frequently out a lot of the time, the space is not functioning as a kitchen, but it's functioning as an aesthetic space.

**NH:** Does your focus on the interior of the building compromise its exterior?

**DB:** It gives the exterior of the building a pleasing look. It's just very straightforward, really simple and visually quiet as far as it fits into the neighborhood. We think it's more important that the big impact is looking out and that the building functions

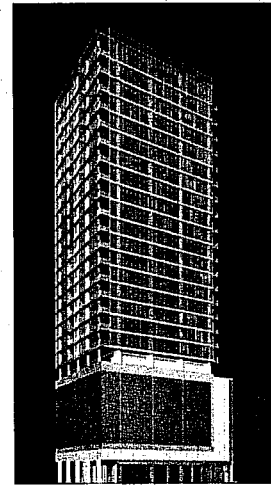
well for the people who inhabit it and for its neighbors.

**NH:** Some prominent architects are feted as celebrities. What do you think of the notion of a "starchitect"?

**DB:** In many respects it's good for all of us because we need to get the public engaged and excited about architecture. There are trophy buildings and celebrity architects, and I hope the right people don't think of it as that alone but delve deeper.

**NH:** You're a self-described "lower-case modernist." What do you think of the debates between people who espouse modern design and those who appreciate neo-historicism?

**DB:** Even though we are a contemporary, modernist firm, I wouldn't say that's the only valid approach. It's not about the approach or style, it's about the quality of pursuing that style. There are too many examples, on buildings that are modern or neo-



550 St. Clair

historical, where the architect applies style as though it is clothing rather than intrinsic to the planning of the building.

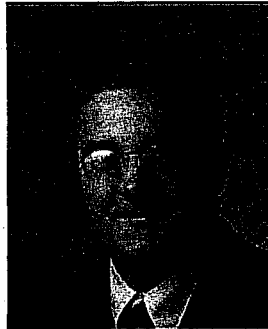
**NH:** Name some good Chicago buildings.

**DB:** ...It's too early to tell, but I'm intrigued by MoMo [by Booth Hansen]. It's a different approach than our work. I'm being simplistic, but we deal in a minimalist, overall more volumetric, expression, and that building is more articulated, more textured; it's almost baroque.

**NH:** How would you like to see Chi-

cago architecture advance?

**DB:** Fewer resources are put into residential building than other building types because the economics of it are extremely tight and challenging, yet it's such a fundamental part of our built environment. I hope we can rethink that formula. We need to figure out how we can bring things like rain-water recovery systems into the housing market. We're not tree-huggers and we don't wear Birkenstocks, but this is a quandary. The green roof is a great thing but it's just scratching the surface. Our resources are not infinite.



# Jim Curtin

## Solomon Cordwell Buenz

Jim Curtin is a principal in Solomon Cordwell Buenz, whose current projects include 50 E. Chestnut, The ParkView and 340 on the Park. He worked with SCB Senior Principal Martin Wolf, who led the team designing the Mandarin Oriental Tower, on that project.

**NH:** What was the vision behind the design for the Mandarin Oriental Tower?

**JC:** We wanted a building designed for 2015 that represents the future of architecture in Chicago. With the advent of the Chicago Energy Code, the idea of glass has become possible not only aesthetically, but also functionally. Buildings become visually lighter and can possess more animation on the exterior while achieving the energy requirements dictated by the code. The Mandarin is a crystalline glass neighbor in an area of darker buildings and has great views of Millennium Park and the Chicago River. On the north and south elevations we're allowing the building to taper, giving the building a posture as it addresses Lake Michigan. On the east facade there is a lantern up at the top, an open latticework of structure and glass, giving the building an iconographic signature.

**NH:** How does the design of the units reflect current or future lifestyle trends?

**JC:** The living-dining areas are designed to be open and large so that you have this feeling of spaciousness when you walk into the unit. The current design is trying to make the bathroom more spa-like and more welcoming. The idea of attention to personal care and relaxation now is entering the mainstream of residences, and people want to capture a little bit of that essence into their home.

**NH:** Describe the architectural climate in Chicago in 2006.

**JC:** In the past, people were trying to fulfill the target market - this kind of granite, this kind of cabinet - and leaving the exterior as more of an enclosure to the unit and its amenities. In River North you had a number of buildings that were following a similar formula for bringing empty nesters downtown and were not looking

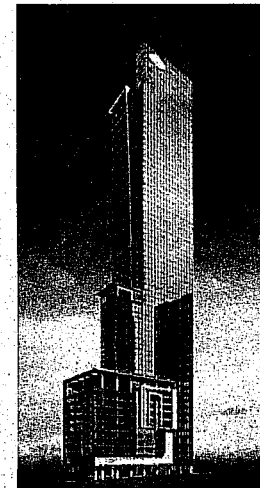
at how the building fits in the city, but how the units are very similar to their homes in the suburbs.

Now there is a better balance between providing the right amenities on the inside with a contemporary, more urban aesthetic on the outside. I believe it coincides somewhat with the creation of Millennium Park. The city can promote its own destiny through how it promotes its own aesthetic. If a city thinks progressively it can't help but have a trickle-down effect to all those players who help build a city...

**NH:** How do those other SCB buildings contribute to the streetscape?

**JC:** The Heritage and The Legacy are unique in the sense that they are one block removed from Michigan Avenue. Michigan Avenue's more traditional aesthetic is preserved, yet the contemporary towers rise above that base and allow the city to capitalize on the evolving growth of Millennium Park...

**NH:** Is this emphasis on good con-



Mandarin Oriental Tower

temporary design a fad, brought on by a hot market?

**JC:** What you're looking at is a snippet in time that is a direct response to current technologies, initiatives by the city for its beautification and a desire from an expanded audience to live within the excitement and activity of an urban environment. Now, anything can happen when we look at absorption and interest rates. However the city is very solid in its attractiveness for housing and these support services. Entertainment, theater, the arts are all helping to solidify the attractiveness of urban living. It

doesn't seem to be an on-off switch.

**NH:** Have you noticed dominant trends in residential architecture?

**JC:** Obviously glass is one, because it's a beautiful city to view. With the land values as they are, you're seeing tall slender buildings, which allow natural light to permeate to the street.

**NH:** Name a great Chicago building designed by an architect not associated with Solomon Cordwell Buenz.

**JC:** Erie on the Park by Lucien Lagrange. It's very expressive. It contrasts with other buildings in that area and is a creative use of glass and steel.