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Outside the Box

Ralph Johnson's quirky Contemporaine eschews cookie-cutter design

A STRIKING NEW BUILDING IS taking shape—make that, taking shapes—in the River North neighborhood. The Contemporaine, a 15-story structure with boxy balconies jutting out of its sides, slim columns supporting some sections of the roof, and glassy boxes at the top, is a departure from the usual brick and concrete towers rising all over town.

Currently under construction at 516 North Wells Street, the Contemporaine is the second Chicago residential tower by the renowned architect Ralph Johnson of Perkins & Will (his first was Skybridge, in the West Loop). We wanted to do a niche building that was dramatic and sculptural, says Colin Kihnke, a partner in CMK Development, the building's developer.

One of the prime features in each of the four penthouses is the atrium room, with two walls of glass soaring 20 feet high in two penthouses, 30 feet high in the others. The two with 30 feet atria are not yet sold: an 1,800-square-foot unit, which is priced at \$949,900, and a 2,500-square-foot full-floor penthouse, going for \$1.69 million. Units on the lower floors all have sleek Miele appliances, Bulthaup cabinets, and balconies, some of them blunt-edged projections. Those are the Ralph Johnson special, Kihnke says. They're going to be where you go to stand and bask in the view. Prices in the unsold units range from \$489,900 for 1,300 square feet to \$1.69 million for the larger penthouse.

