

# TRENDS

COMMERCIAL  
DESIGN

Volume 11 No. 10  
**\$9.95**

Includes 6.3.7

[TrendsIdeas.com](http://TrendsIdeas.com)





# Skyline sculpture

“Contemporary residential high-rises should contribute a sculptural presence to a cityscape, and at the same time be a direct response to their use and specific site situation.”

*Ralph Johnson, architect, Perkins + Will*



*Preceding page and this page:* Contemporaine, conceived by architect Ralph Johnson, has sculptural impact from skyline to street level.



# Far-sighted

A towering sculpture of steel and glass addresses a human scale in terms of its residential use and its street-level admirers

Contemporary apartment living doesn't have to mean modest floor plans and a design governed solely by value engineering. When forward-thinking developers meet inspired architects, both residents and the general public reap the benefits.

Contemporaine is just such a meeting of unconstrained minds. AIA national award winner in 2005, Contemporaine was backed by progressive developer Colin Kihnke and conceived by prominent architect Ralph Johnson, of Perkins + Will.

"As a developer, Kihnke was unique," says Johnson. "He is interested in modern architecture without compromise. Our firm took that dictate and ran with it."

Contemporaine's distinctive profile, defined by a concrete canopy and projecting penthouse, establishes the building as a piece of skyline sculpture.

The mixed-use structure comprises four stories of retail and garage space, standing as a pedestal to an 11-story

residential volume of concrete and glass. Giant columns at the top and base visually connect residential floors to the ground.

"Budgets for residential multi-family architecture are generally tight, so a value-driven structure often becomes the expression of the whole, with window systems infilling between this framework."

While this was not the case with Contemporaine, site restrictions did



Cantilevered balconies provide a giddy view of downtown Chicago.



present a constraining factor. The base of the structure fills the entire lot, yet works well on a pedestrian scale.

This was partially achieved by the base levels of retail and garage parking being left exposed with floor-to-ceiling glass.

"The ramps of the parking structure are expressed internally into the north facade of the building to provide a dynamic image for the building," says Johnson. "This turns what could have been a negative into a positive, and creates a kinetic urban sculpture event from the street."

Above the base of parking and retail, the apartments feature balconies cantilevered out like mini promenades. These provide residents with a connection to the environment and a feature element of Contemporaine's exterior.

"The building was originally planned for 60 units, but ended up being 28 units because of the number of people who bought two units and combined them," says Johnson. "The openness of the original layouts made these mergers possible, as well as customization with a minimum

*This page:* The owner made optimum use of the penthouse's oversized terraces. As well as a comprehensive Japanese garden, there is a sundeck, a dining setting, an open air living room, and an outdoor office. These summer-use only outdoor living rooms are separated partly by the garden's planters and water features. Contemporaine's towering concrete feature wall provides one backdrop for the outdoor living room. Visitors to the apartment walk out of the lift to a sight of a bustling city - as viewed through the mature rooftop garden.



amount of change to the standard layout. The floor-to-ceiling glass and open ceiling exposed structure allowed for the opening up of individual bedroom spaces to create more loft-like, open-plan units."

The second-highest penthouse, appearing on these pages, features an oversized terrace. The apartment has 280m<sup>2</sup> of interior space balanced by 280m<sup>2</sup> of rooftop exteriors.

The owner, Jon Butcher, had dynamic plans for the space that matched the drama of the building itself.



*Top Left:* Bamboo wallcoverings extend the Japanese theme in the elongated hallway.

*Above Left:* Even touches, such as the hallway lanterns, reflect an oriental theme. The apartment combines the contemporary and the Eastern throughout.

*Above Right:* Low tech meets high tech with the overhead candles made from wax, but illuminated with a bulb instead of a wick. The patterns in the rug, designed by interior designer Richar, echo the slate surfaces in the hall and outside. A low-slung table and a Japanese monk's brick-patterned habit stretched out on the wall add to the Eastern influence.



*Above:* The owners often dine out, and the kitchen was conceived partly as a walk through space.

*Following page:* With an apartment built from steel, glass, and concrete, there could be a tendency for the interior to have a cold atmosphere. However, the owner took pains to avoid this feel – wanting instead to marry the cool, angular space with softer touches. The flowing lines of falling drapes soften the strongly linear nature of the window frames in the living room, for example.

"Walking out onto this expanse for the first time, I envisaged it transformed into an authentic Japanese garden," he says.

Butcher's vision stretched to a mature garden complete with an ornamental pond, a waterfall, substantial boulders, mature pines and unpolished slate underfoot.

When it came to the apartment's interior, the owner's plans were equally focused.

"I dislike hallways employed purely as a functional transition. They should also fulfill an aesthetic function. Originally, the apartment had a hall running through its

centre, with rooms such as guest bedrooms pushed out to the glass," he says. "By moving the hall hard up to the north side of the apartment, we experience the full effect of a 30m run of floor-to-ceiling glazing."

Beyond the hall, on the east corner of the apartment, the open-plan living area, opens up to a 7.4m high wall of glass.

"The penthouse's open-plan living areas and hallway, like Contemporaine's translucent exterior, provide views that never cease to surprise and captivate onlookers," says Butcher.



**Location:** Contemporaine, Chicago, IL  
**Architect:** Ralph Johnson, Perkins & Will (Chicago, IL)  
**Developer:** CMK Development  
**Interior designer, public spaces:** Perkins & Will  
**Principal contractor, building:** McShane Construction  
**Principal contractor, apartment:** Lochert Company  
**Consulting structural engineers:**  
 CE Anderson & Associates  
**Consulting mechanical, electrical, plumbing engineers:** McGuire Engineers  
**Civil engineering:** Terra Engineering  
**Mechanical design build contractor:**  
 AMS Mechanical Systems  
**Plumbing design build contractor:**  
 CJ Erikson Plumbing

**Structural concrete:**  
 Concrete Structures of the Midwest  
**Exterior siding:** Metal, glass from Mannix Window Wall System  
**Metal detailing:** Aiolite architectural louvres, Alpolic composite aluminium panels  
**Glass rails:** Sterling Dula glass guardrails  
**Roofing:** Carlisle EPDM roofing membrane  
**Glazing:** AFG Industries  
**Hardware:** Schlage door hardware  
**Interior designer, apartment:** Richar Interiors  
**Apartment garden designer:** Hoichi Kurisu  
**Apartment lighting designer:** Bruce Yarnell  
**Kitchen manufacturer:** Bulthaup  
**Furniture:** Custom Christian Liaigre from Holly Hunt

**Sink:** Custom  
**Taps:** Dornbracht  
**Benchtops:** Granite  
**Oven and cooktop:** Miele  
**Refrigerator:** Sub-Zero  
**Home automation:** Media Tech  
**Flooring:** Rift oak in Fantasy Brown  
**Wallcoverings:** Bamboo

*Building photography by James Steinkamp;  
 apartment photography by John Umberger*