

# Modern with Clean Lines Defines CMK

Chicago developer strives to deliver 'architecture that grabs you'

By Leslie Mann  
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Memo to recent college graduates: If you want a job in a certain field, get your foot in the door by securing an internship. It worked for Colin Kihnke, who parlayed his internship into a career as a condominium developer.

"I knew I wanted to be in the field, so I cold-called companies until I found one that would take me," Kihnke recalls of the internship he landed 17 years ago, after he graduated from North Park University.

Although Kihnke's father is an engineer and his mother a teacher, he says, "Real estate was in my blood. That's what I always wanted to do." While the neighbor kids were playing kick the can, he was building forts, he says. "Not just forts, but lots of forts. I was a mini-developer."

Using money he earned by rehabbing properties in Bucktown, Kihnke built his first high-rise in the South Loop. He followed his instinct, choosing a design he thought would attract young urban buyers like himself. "I build what I like -- modern, with clean lines," he says.

His formula still works as he continues to build for single and married buyers who, he says, "buy their first places in the city, then stay in the city when they get married instead of moving to the suburbs."

Currently, Kihnke's Chicago-based company, CMK Cos. Ltd., has two condominium buildings in the works. Designed by



Colin Kihnke, President of CMK Cos., in the 1720 S. Michigan high-rise which was designed by David Brininstool of Brininstool + Lynch.

architect David Brininstool of Brininstool + Lynch, 1720 S. Michigan is a 33-story, 498-unit building where base prices are \$199,900 for one-bedroom units, \$249,900 for two-bedrooms and \$379,900 for three-bedrooms.

Prices are similar at CMK's new building at 235 Van Buren. Designed by Ralph Johnson of Perkins + Will, this 46-story building includes 714 one-, two- and three-bedroom units with cantilevered balconies.

It's no accident that CMK buildings are designed by well-known architects, says Kihnke, who strives for "architecture that grabs you."

"Many of our buyers are architects, which is testament to our work," says Kihnke.

Like most of CMK's previous buildings, these high-rises feature open floor plans with 10-foot ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows and upscale finishes such as granite and hardwood.

Building amenities include 24-hour doormen and secure parking garages, but do not include swimming pools or health clubs, by intention, says

Kihnke. "This keeps the monthly assessments low, which is what our buyers want," he says. "There are health clubs within walking distance of the buildings." About 20 percent of his buyers have dogs, says Kihnke, whose own family includes a golden retriever, so dog runs are requisites.

To keep abreast of buyers' demands, the CMK staff of 18 conducts weekly meetings. "The buyers tell us what they want and we incorporate that into our buildings," says Kihnke. "For example, they tell us every inch should be functional, so we put computer alcoves in hallway space that is otherwise unused. First-time buyers don't want studios, so we offer low-priced, one-bedroom units for them."

CMK buyers appreciate its eco-friendly practices, says Kihnke. In addition to choosing energy-efficient building products, he says, CMK recycles 90 percent of its construction waste. Its Van Buren building's environmentally-friendly amenities include a green roof, a car-sharing franchise desk and plenty of bike racks.

Since 2004, CMK has also been

developing condominiums in the Caribbean. Its latest development there is a 2,400-acre, mixed-use project at South Caicos.

Off-duty, Kihnke and his wife, Tracey, a Shedd Aquarium dolphin trainer, split their time between Chicago and their native Michigan, where their children get a dose of the small-town values they prize, says Kihnke.

Years ago, Kihnke memorized a Ferdinand Magellan quote that serves as his beacon: "The sea is dangerous and its storms terrible, but these obstacles have never been sufficient reason to remain ashore ... embark on the most daring of endeavors ... to meet the shadowy future without fear and conquer the unknown."

"That reminds me to keep a Zen-like focus," says Kihnke. "At this point in my career, I can see behind the curtain and know that every project is really a multitude of tasks, from site selection to handing over the building management to the [homeowners] association. Instead of letting every task become a stumbling block, I hunker down and focus on the result, handing over the key to buyers."