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From the Houston Business Journal:
<http://www.bizjournals.com/houston/news/2017/01/31/exclusive-groundbreaking-planned-for-luxury-condo.html>

Exclusive: Groundbreaking planned for luxury condo in Museum District

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Jan 31, 2017, 12:05pm CST

Oxberry Group is planning to break ground in mid-February on The Mondrian at the Museums, a luxury condominium project in the Museum District.

The Houston developer has secured construction financing from Galveston-based Moody National Bank and is awaiting final city permitting to begin construction next month, said PJ Jamea, a co-founder of Oxberry Group.



COURTESY OXBERRY GROUP

The eight-story, 20-unit condo project is set to rise on the former site of the John C. Freeman Weather Museum at 5104 Caroline St., near the Asia Society Texas Center. The former Weather Museum was demolished in September.

The Mondrian, designed by architects Perkins + Will and EDI International, features a modern Tetris-like steel and glass facade inspired by Piet Mondrian, a Dutch artist who is known for his modern geometric paintings.

The condo building features three- and four-bedroom units — boasting expansive, floor-to-ceiling glass windows and two-story art gallery walls— that average about 3,000 square feet and start from \$1.25 million. Two 4,400-square-foot penthouse units at the top of the building will feature a small infinity lap pool on the patio and an interior courtyard with a Japanese-style Zen garden. A 24-hour concierge service will help residents pick up dry cleaning and packages.

Since announcing the project in August 2015, Oxberry Group has pre-sold 11 units, which is a little more than half of the units in The Mondrian. The pre-sales paved the way for Oxberry Group's construction loan from Moody National Bank, which will help finance 75 percent of the project.

Despite concerns about low oil prices, the energy downturn didn't affect sales or foot traffic to The Mondrian, Jamea said.

"Of course, we were worried a little bit, but the majority of our buyers are empty nesters who are downsizing," Jamea said. "We didn't see any slowdown in traffic."

Oxberry Group expects to finish construction on The Mondrian in the summer of 2018. The developer said it is confident it will sell the remaining nine units in the building.

"We wanted this to be our signature building and a work of art," Jamea said. "Even though we have good renderings and animations, we just don't feel like it does it justice. That's why we just wanted to start building this building. I think people will come as soon as we start construction. I'm not worried about sales at all."

Oxberry Group, led by brothers Sean and PJ Jamea, has 14 years of experience in residential, retail, office, industrial and mixed-use development. The company's residential portfolio includes Midtown Grove apartments, Chenevert condominiums and Sanaz townhomes, according to its website.

Project Partners:

Exterior architect: **Perkins + Will**, based in Washington, D.C., and Houston

Interior architect: **MaRs Culture**, based in Houston

Architect of Record: **EDI International**, based in Houston

Civil engineer: **LJA Engineering**, based in Houston

Structural engineer: **Matrix Structural Engineers**, based in Houston

MEP engineer: **The PDC Group**, based in Tomball

Acoustical Consultant: **SLR International Corp.**, based in Houston

General contractor: **Jordan Foster Construction**, based in Houston

Sales manager: **Sudhoff Cos.**, based in Houston

Developer pioneers "resilient design" in Houston

PJ Jamea envisioned a "signature" building in The Mondrian, one that would elicit critical acclaim for its modern design and high-end features.

But the Houston developer also wanted the luxury condominium project to be resilient, one that could withstand flooding that has become all too common in the low-lying Bayou City.

That's why Jamea, a co-principal of Oxberry Group, decided to add a back-up power generator on the roof of The Mondrian, which would power the building's critical infrastructure, such as elevators, during an emergency.

"In Houston, we do get hurricanes and flooding," Jamea said. "If the power goes out, we have eight floors you have to go down. Having a backup generator makes our building much safer."

In recent years, developers across the country have begun embracing an emerging architectural philosophy called "resilient design," which aims to fortify buildings from rising sea levels, hurricane surges and severe rainstorms.

In Houston, several residential high-rise and midrise developers are adding backup power generators to their condominium projects that would power the building in the event of an outage. Houston building codes require backup generators in high-rise buildings over 75 feet tall, but do not require them in midrise buildings.

In addition to Oxberry Group's The Mondrian, Houston-based Pelican Builders Inc. is adding a backup power generator to The Wilshire, a 17-story, 96-unit Class A condo tower in the Uptown/Galleria area.

Jamea, who initially planned to break ground on The Mondrian in early 2016, spent an extra half year and about \$400,000 to add a natural gas-powered backup generator to the eight-story, 20-unit condo building.

Oxberry Group's team of architects and engineers worked with Centerpoint Energy to add a special 300-square-foot "vault" on the ground floor for an on-site transformer. The team redesigned the first level of parking and the ground floor to fit all of the electrical equipment. Architects and engineers also left a spot on roof of The Mondrian that would support a 9,400-pound Kohler backup generator.

"There's a lot that goes into this," Jamea said. "In our case, this triggered a lot of changes with our consultants and architects, which easily added five months to the development process. It was an extra cost and time, but I'm glad we're doing this."

Paul Takahashi

Reporter

Houston Business Journal

