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747 North Clark Street | Chicago | The Miller Hull Partnership

FRAME FOR LIVING

A Seattle firm adheres to Miesian history in renovating a building in the master's adopted hometown.

BY JAMES GAUER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARTY PETERS



Chicago's gentrifying River North neighborhood is a gritty mix of older commercial and newer residential buildings. Among these is 747 North Clark Street, a 22,000-square-foot condominium completed last year. The seven-story structure fills a midblock lot only 40 feet wide by 100 feet deep, with its lot-line walls, flanked by buildings of only two stories, mostly blank. But its facade is an eye-catcher: glass in a black-steel frame whose elegant proportions recall Mies van der Rohe's archetypal Lake Shore Drive apartment towers. It pays fitting homage to Chicago's modernist heritage.

And yet this building's design architect, The Miller Hull Partnership, is from . . . Seattle. Why, in a city with no shortage of architectural talent, did developer Bob Ranquist look so far afield? "I saw their work in a magazine," he said. "I liked it, so I called them." (The magazine was ARCHITECTURAL RECORD, October 2002, page 228; the project was 1310 East Union, a live-work loft building in Seattle). Since then, Miller Hull has executed six projects for Ranquist. "While Chicago has tremendous architects," adds Ranquist's associate Zev Salomon, "the general direction of design at the multifamily level has not trended toward modern in the last 20 years."

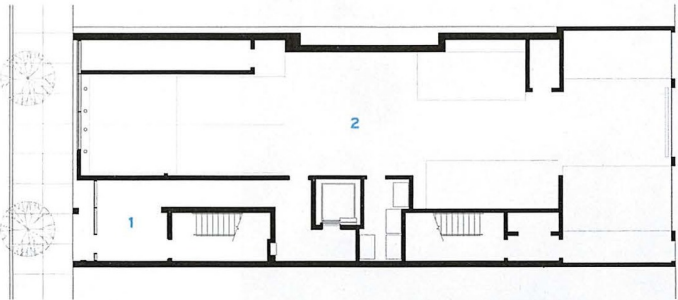
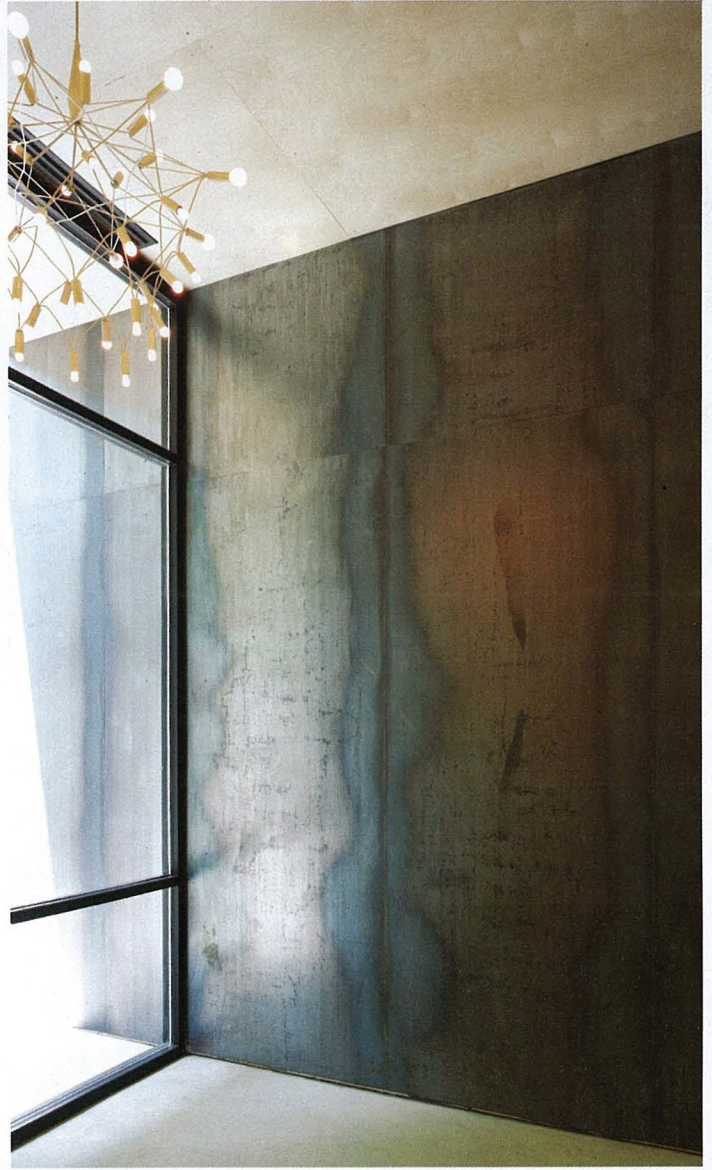
747 had an unpromising start. The existing building, 80 percent finished when the recession stopped its construction, was derelict in 2012 when Ranquist bought it. Miller Hull redesigned the exterior, and Sullivan, Goulette & Wilson of Chicago designed the interior and served as architect of record. While the turnaround from design to finish took about a year and a half, at a total construction cost of \$143 per square foot, the challenges were many. According to Miller Hull partner Brian Court, "The previous design was underwhelming. It had a steel frame but was conceived as a neotraditional building with Georgian-style window proportions. Still, it had potential." The foundation, the masonry bearing walls, and the floor and roof structure were the only elements to be reused.

Concrete masonry stairs, elevator, and party walls account for lateral loads and fire protection, but steel is ubiquitous—as both the frame for gravity loads and on the facade, extending into a seventh-floor pergola. Steel channels clad the ends of the party walls, hot-rolled plate defines the entry, and a screen of corrugated perforated steel conceals the garage.



LEAN MACHINE
The seven-story condominium building rises above its neighbors (opposite) in a gentrifying area not far from Water Tower Place. The facade's elegantly proportioned black-steel frame (left) evokes Chicago's Miesian tradition and turns into a pergola on the top floor.





FIRST FLOOR PLAN

0 16 FT. 5 M.



TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN

- 1 ENTRANCE
- 2 CAR ACCESS
- 3 LIVING AREA
- 4 DINING/KITCHEN
- 5 MEDIA
- 6 MASTER BEDROOM
- 7 BEDROOM

SPATIAL INFILTRATION

A screen of corrugated perforated steel conceals the garage (opposite, left). At the entrance, hot-rolled steel plate connects the interior and exterior (opposite, right). Each unit has 10-foot ceilings and walls of glass opening onto a balcony.



In counterpoint to all that steel, a charred-oak front door and a clear-finished-wood ceiling with a splash of bright yellow enamel mark the entry. The monochromatic interiors of the apartments are more restrained and refined: a structure free of internal columns or shear walls allows the plans to be open and flexible, with unobstructed vistas through the 100-foot length of each of the six full-floor, three-bedroom condos. All have 10-foot ceilings, walls entirely of glass at both the front and the rear, and private decks. "The high-end residential buyer in Chicago is pretty design-savvy," notes Chris Michalek, senior project architect at Sullivan, Goulette & Wilson. "We always keep this in mind when laying out a unit plan. Simple elegance and efficient use of space are key here." It's an approach well suited to a city whose architecture is firmly rooted in the tradition of "less is more." ■

James Gauer, based in Victoria, B.C., and Chicago, is an architect and the author of The New American Dream: Living Well in Small Homes (2004).

credits

DESIGN ARCHITECT: The Miller Hull Partnership – David Miller, Brian Court, partners

ARCHITECT OF RECORD: Sullivan, Goulette & Wilson

ENGINEERS: SP Engineers (structural)

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Maris Construction

CLIENT: Ranquist Development Group

SIZE: 22,000 square feet

COST: \$2.5 million

COMPLETION DATE: May 2014

SOURCES

GLASS: Tru-Lite

WINDOW FRAMES: Pittco Architectural Metals

STEEL: American Steel Fabricators (facade)

ROOFING SYSTEM: CertainTeed

HARDWARE: Emtek, Häfele, Unison Hardware (INOX)

FLOOR AND WALL TILE: Transceramica, Iris Ceramica, Ariosteia, Fiandre, Ann Sacks