



Breaking the Mold, Again

Freight Residences presents urban apartment living in a whole new light

WORDS: Clinton Waiz

Just beyond the edge of design where the practical need for a single structure is eclipsed by the desire for something more lies a grander notion about the possibilities of public and private development. Planners and architects use the term placemaking to encapsulate a development process that values the creation of community in equal measure with functional usefulness, aesthetic appeal and commercial profitability. It is at this intersection of necessity and ambition that a new 48-unit multifamily housing project known as Freight Residences takes shape. It joins a collection of other versatile-purpose buildings to cap the creation of Taxi, a unique live-work-play environment in the River North area along the Platte River just beyond Denver's central core.

Led by father-and-son team Mickey and Kyle Zeppelin, Zeppelin Development has applied a visionary approach to the transformation of what was once a seemingly barren industrial wasteland. Beginning in 2002 with the repurpose of a former Yellow Cab headquarters and dispatch center as an energetic, flexible-use office environment, Taxi has been both a catalyst and model for industrial revitalization along Brighton Boulevard.

"Zeppelin projects have always rejected a merchant-fee approach to development and instead respond to common human experiences framed within the context of urban reactivation," remarked Chris Woldum, Zeppelin's project manager for Freight Residences. Marking the eighth phase of the Taxi development's evolution, Freight Residences presents a new living experience that veers away from "typical" rental-rate apartment buildings by targeting an underserved demographic - young families with urban sensibilities.

"Since Kyle and his family live at the Taxi site, he has a true inside perspective of what it means to live urban while raising a family. Freight Residences will provide a rental option designed for its unique sense of place in the urban fringe, rejecting strictly dense or suburban models of development," continued Woldum.

By contrasting Kyle's experiences on the site with those of other urbanite family lifestyles, the programmatic basis for Freight Residences is to reduce the overall sense of unit homogeneity common to most apartment buildings. A key to accomplishing an individualized sense of place was to restrict the need for primary corridors typical of a "dorm-after-college" type of apartment building. Here only one-bedroom units on Floor Three are accessed through such a hallway; everyone else has their own front door. Other great benefits of this design approach are multisided access to daylight and the opportunity for east-west cross-air circulation within most units.

Freight Residences' one-, two-, and three-bedroom units are configured over four-stories as a series of intertwined living spaces fit together by

purpose more than patterned placement. Typically, rental options include a block of two-story townhomes with private garden entrances. Internally, each unit is unique with spaces designed to attract a diverse mix of residents ranging from families with small children in larger units to penthouse suites for the perpetual bachelor or empty nesters looking for affordable close-in living. Smaller apartments are designed to attract younger renters who want to be close to the city's vibrancy without sacrificing green space.

For architect Stephen Dynia of Dynia Architects, Freight Residences is the fourth commission on the Taxi site following his successes at Drive I and Drive II and Freight, a high-impact rearticulation of a former mid-century brick dock-high shipping terminal into highly functional, creative work spaces. Dynia was quick to point out that on Zeppelin projects, the challenge is always to advance the edge of design a step further.

"Capturing the Colorado experience means working to diminish the division of interior and exterior spaces - offering immediate access to light, sound, air and city or mountain views," shared Dynia. Operable garage door openings with countertop bars are integrated into every unit so each space can be opened to everything city living is about. A large open space just beyond the eastern garden units will feature turf play areas, ringed by native and adaptive species in an elegant xeric-homage to post-industrial overgrowth. It's a theme that resonates throughout the site, borrowing industrial aesthetics from former purposes and materials and celebrating them in new ways.

"An important part of all of the buildings on the Taxi site is their ability to offer something of human value, communal spaces designed for the common good," continued Dynia. Freight Residence's contribution to Taxi's community offerings will be a children's art studio and display space built into the lobby. It will make a great complement to the Early Childhood Education center located just steps away at Freight. Other common amenities dispersed throughout the Taxi site include a gym, multiple conference rooms, coffee shops, large kitchens and gathering places, a community pool made from former shipping containers - the list goes on. "Residents are going to be getting an amenities package well beyond what is generally available to a 48-unit development while also joining an already well-developed business, retail and cultural community with creative sensibilities," continued Dynia. There is even a planned pedestrian bridge over the Platte to provide direct access to Source, an artisan and craft market place just across Brighton Boulevard, which also was developed by Zeppelin and designed by Dynia Architects.

Like all of the buildings on the Taxi site, Zeppelin's development strategy is to build and hold rather than stabilize and flip, which reinforces the importance of designing and building a long-term viable addition to the firm's portfolio.

"Zeppelin Development has always been about seeing change in the market place coming and staying ahead of the curve," finished Woldum. "Mickey was developing properties in LoDo and the Golden Triangle well before general development interest. He has a passion for seeing the beauty and potential in what feels like forgotten places and injecting new life into them through exceptional design centered on the long-term human experience." \



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Rendering of Freight Residences interior

ABOVE TOP:

Freight Residences under construction

ABOVE BOTTOM:

Exterior rendering of Freight Residences

PROJECT TEAM

DEVELOPER: Zeppelin Development

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Brinkmann Constructors

ARCHITECT: Dynia Architects

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: KL&A

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: PLOT Landscape