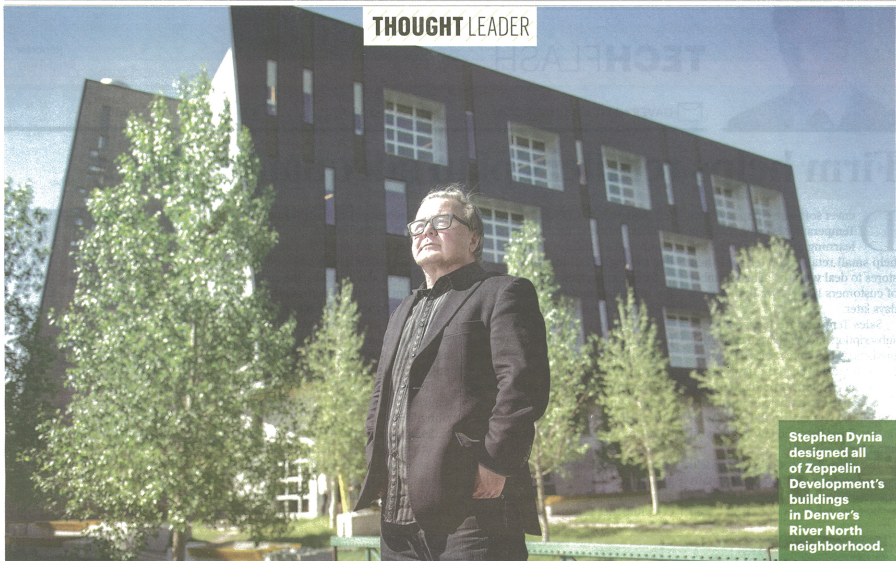


## THOUGHT LEADER



**Stephen Dymia** designed all of Zeppelin Development's buildings in Denver's River North neighborhood.

KATHLEEN LAVINE, BUSINESS JOURNAL

## Preserving the past

RINO ARCHITECT STEPHEN DYNIA LED DESIGN ON KEY PROJECTS

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**M**any well-known names in Denver are associated with the boom in activity in Denver's River North neighborhood.

But one person who has shaped the look of the neighborhood and whose name may not be as well known is Stephen Dymia, the go-to architect for Zeppelin Development, which redeveloped a former taxi dispatch center and started the RiNo revolution.

Dymia led the design work for some of RiNo's most recognizable buildings, such as the Source and the Freight Residences, and projects that are still ongoing, such as Zeppelin Station and the Source Hotel.

He's also worked on projects in RiNo that are outside of the Zeppelin sphere. His company designed The Laundry on Lawrence, a co-working space for lawyers that opened last year in an old laundromat at 2701 Lawrence St.

RiNo is known for its "grit," a characteristic of the area's industrial past. Exposed brick and beams, concrete floors and garage doors that can be thrown open to let in fresh air are the hallmarks of the neighborhood. These design points grew out of the desire to preserve the existing buildings and leverage the

### STEPHEN DYNIA

**Age:** 61  
**Education:** Bachelor of Arts and Architecture from Rhode Island School of Design in 1983  
**Favorite reading:** New York Review of Books

unfinished feeling into something different that has proved to be popular, especially with creative firms and boutique retailers, Dymia said.

RiNo has exploded in popularity in recent years, with property values soaring and companies and residents flocking to the area. Some of the credit for that is given to the area's atmosphere, which exudes a laid-back style that contrasts with more buttoned-up office neighborhoods in the central business district and in the Denver Tech Center. The area is a magnet for co-working space, breweries, and is the planned site for big new developments like the World Trade Center's proposed \$200 million campus.

Dymia's career didn't begin with designing RiNo. He started out in New York City, then in 1993 opened a practice in Jackson, Wyoming. Somewhere in the mid-2000s, he started doing work in Denver, and now runs an office with 12 employees. Dymia Architects runs on a company culture that is design-focused, he said.

"No projects are just for paying the bills," he said. "Architecture is an intersection of art, science and business."

In addition to the commercial buildings found in RiNo, Dymia has a thick residential portfolio including high-end mountain homes, and worked on the Jackson Hole

Performing Arts Pavilion, as well as New York City skyscrapers.

But he likes the work he's done in RiNo because of the variety and the chance to make the buildings work together.

"We can exercise our design abilities through a wide span of building types," he said. "And it's a great opportunity to work in a concentrated area."

And like many of the neighborhood's advocates, he hopes that RiNo maintains its character as it continues to grow. Those who have been in the neighborhood for years argue that rising property values are driving out the artistic community that pre-dates the rows of buildings now taking shape and that gives the area enough flair to balance out the edge of its warehouse history.

"I hope that it saves enough of its soul that it doesn't become like other places," he said. "There's something in RiNo marking the place it's been in history. I hope it doesn't develop to look like any other part of town."

He also warns against developing for development's sake, saying that especially in popular neighborhoods like RiNo, projects should be carefully considered and should only be built when it's necessary for the community.

"You need to ask 'How do you insert things that are needed?'" Dymia said.

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