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Developers praise architect designing new hotel for downtown Spartanburg

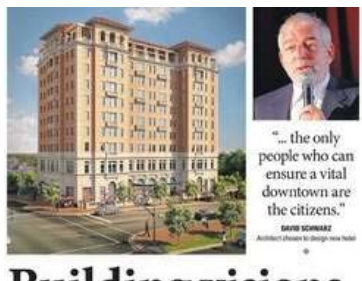
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Published: Saturday, July 18, 2015 at 7:22 p.m.

Local developers consider the architect selected to design the new AC Hotel by Marriott planned for downtown Spartanburg a creative genius.

David Schwarz, of Washington, D.C.-based David M. Schwarz Architects, is working with the local firm McMillan Pazdan Smith on the project. An announcement about the hotel and the architect was made in June. OTO Development's \$20 million dollar, 10-story AC Hotel by Marriott will be built at the corner of West Main Street and Daniel Morgan Avenue.



David Schwarz, of Washington, D.C.-based David M. Schwarz Architects, is working with the local firm McMillan Pazdan Smith to design the new AC Hotel by Marriott planned for downtown Spartanburg.

Schwarz already has made an imprint on downtown because his firm designed the Chapman Cultural Center, the University of South Carolina Upstate's George Dean Johnson Jr. College of Business and Economics, and the Upper School at Spartanburg Day School.

"His philosophy is centered around contextual architecture," said George Dean "Geordy" Johnson III. "He understands Spartanburg and designs his buildings with our community in mind. Regardless of use, all of his buildings are seen as interactive parts of a larger whole. He designs buildings of appropriate scale and detail to serve the people who use them."

Johnson said last year, he and other officials involved in the hotel project took Schwarz to lunch at Cribbs Kitchen. As they waited for their food, Schwarz left and walked around West Main Street, by himself, looking at different sites from every angle and perspective.

Johnson said as Schwarz always does, he was getting a feel for the city's western corridor and how the hotel would fit in there and in relation to the rest of downtown.

Schwarz considers the West Main site a great punctuation point for downtown. The developers discussed a smaller building, three to four stories, "but to make a major impact downtown, we needed a much larger building," Schwarz said.

The hotel will define the edge of Spartanburg's west side, such as the Chapman Cultural Center, which opened in 2007, does on St. John Street.

The new hotel will have about 114 rooms; a rooftop bar on the 10th floor with an outdoor terrace; a signature restaurant, the AC Kitchen; fitness room; outdoor pool; landscaped garden at street level; and 2,000 square feet of meeting space.

OTO Development CEO Corry Oakes said Schwarz's firm took the time to build models showing the hotel at several different heights before deciding on the 10-story plan. Thoughtful is a word both Johnson and Oakes use to describe Schwarz, as he

considers all aspects of an area and how a new building will fit into the greater context of a city.

“(Schwarz) has a great shop, and he’s a believer in hiring talented people,” Oakes said. “His team has worked on other (Spartanburg) projects, so there’s that continuity. He produces some amazing details.”

Developers said a major aspect of the hotel design was how it fit with Morgan Square.

“He strongly believes, as we believe, that the core of downtown needs to speak to the entire community,” Oakes said. “Morgan Square is where that should happen, and this hotel needed to work with that.”

The architects and designers had to consider how Main Street would look from the different floors of the hotel and how the new building would connect with the rest of downtown. Developers said the hotel design will encourage visitors to walk to restaurants and other businesses in the area.

The team had “to consider where to place things inside the hotel so that there appears to be life outside the building at all times,” Oakes said.

The final design?

“It’s stunning,” Oakes said.

Spartanburg developers also point out that Schwarz has a track record of revitalizing languishing urban areas. In Fort Worth, Texas, Schwarz has designed about 40 buildings over the last 30 years.

“The economic activity in their downtown has vastly accelerated during this transformation,” Johnson said.

Schwarz was named the 2015 recipient of the Richard H. Driehaus Prize, awarded by the University of Notre Dame. The prize was established in 2003 to honor lifetime contributions of an architect “to traditional, classical and sustainable architecture and urbanism in the modern world,” according to the university.

“This is a world renowned prize, and we could not think of a better endorsement for a candidate as we considered options for an architect,” Johnson said.

Like downtown Fort Worth, Spartanburg’s downtown needed a lot of TLC at one point in its history. But Schwarz said he’s found as he’s designed projects in both cities that excitement continues to grow.

“In Fort Worth, the more we build, the more excited people have gotten,” Schwarz said. “In Spartanburg, there’s such a commitment to have a vibrant downtown. It’s inevitable it’s going to happen.”

Schwarz said by age 6, he knew he wanted to become an architect, after getting scolded by his mother at a dinner party because he mixed red and white gravel of a terraced yard as he played outside.

“She said, ‘If you want to do that, you have to become an architect,’” Schwarz said.

Now, being able to add to a city’s development through his work is rewarding.

“You can shape its future — it’s a wonderful feeling,” Schwarz said. “But the only people who can ensure a vital downtown are the citizens. They’ve got to come downtown and use everything that we build.”

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