

## New York landmarks inspire developer

**Richard White**

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The following is part of an ongoing series of columns profiling some of Calgary's condo developers.

Some may think that moving from small town to downtown -- and from single-family homes to highrise developments -- is a big jump.

But that's nothing for Arcus Developments Inc.

A couple of years ago, after learning about the striking new Astoria on Tenth condo project under construction at 10th Avenue at 9th Street S.W., my next thought was: "Who's Arcus?"

The Calgary-based development company was only formed a relatively short time before in 2005, with Astoria being one of its first projects.

The company was founded by Gerry Mendyk, Johannes van Leenen, Brent Bailey and Al Coulter.

It is a spin-off of WestView Builders, a prolific single-family homebuilder in bedroom communities around Calgary and Edmonton.

"We were presented with a very interesting opportunity with Astoria and after much analysis, we realized that creating horizontal and vertical communities is not that different," says Arcus president Mendyk.

Astoria on Tenth is one of the most ambitious developments under construction in the Beltline.

It is the first condo to be developed across from the CP Rail tracks -- not exactly a preferred neighbour.

It is also the first phase of a much larger project, which will include a boutique hotel next door, and possibly a second condo tower.

Combine this with a colourful new office building across the street (by Tonko), the ever-popular Mountain Equipment Co-op and Bonterra Trattoria restaurant -- as well as two major grocery stores close by -- and you have a new live/work/play hub in Calgary's downtown.

I am impressed by Arcus owners' commitment to create a building that will be an architectural statement, and not just another "box."

They conducted extensive architectural research to determine the style they wanted for Astoria, before deciding on an Art Deco-inspired building for their first highrise condo building.

More specifically, the Arcus partners were most impressed with landmark Art deco building, the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, in New York.

As I have said in the past, great architecture, like great art, builds upon what has been built in the past, but has a contemporary twist.

The Art deco period, which lasted from 1925 to 1939, was a time of opulence and lavishness, a response to the forced austerity of the First World War.

It's an elegant style familiar to anyone who has seen the opulent, Art Deco sets of such 1930s films as Top Hat starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, or the iconic spire of the Chrysler building in New York.

The architecture of the period was based on mathematical geometric shapes, repeated patterns, clean lines, hard edges, reflective surfaces and man-made materials.

New York's famed Waldorf-Astoria is another landmark Art deco building noted for its unique, spiked rooftop ornamentation and luxurious lobby.

"Everyone does modern," says Mendyk.

"We want to do something different. We want Astoria's architecture to link the past with the present and the future in a timeless and romantic manner."

Mendyk has an obvious passion for architecture and design, and he is proud of WestView and Arcus' ability to heighten the level of design and architecture in the communities they build.

After looking at the work of numerous architects, they chose Cliff Korman and the Toronto architectural firm of Kirkor Architecture to be the design architect for Astoria.

Korman has an impressive portfolio of contemporary and Art Deco-inspired condos in the Toronto area, including The Ellipse (twin elliptical glass towers), NY Towers Community (six-tower project), The Capital and The Arc.

For Astoria on Tenth, Korman has designed a podium at its base that will include retail and a luxurious lobby, thus creating a street-friendly presence.

The facade design is dominated by strong vertical lines that create a "soaring to the sky" sensation linked to the origin of the term, skyscraper.

The roof will be capped with an ornamental cupola and spire that will link to other Calgary modern rooftops like Bankers Hall and Five West (another New York-inspired condo), yet provide sharp contrast to the flat-top roofs of the buildings surrounding it, thereby creating a unique sense of place.

Mendyk demonstrated to me his commitment to getting it right when he and his partners, not overly thrilled with the original lobby design of Astoria on Tenth, approached Jerilyn Wright and Associates of Calgary to redesign the lobby, adding more elegance and romance to better recall the Art Deco period.

The result is a lobby with shimmering marble floors and a dramatic chandelier, a new fourth floor owner's lounge and a private red carpet

cinema.

The signature feature will be a six-foot wide, custom-designed replica of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel's chandelier (for more information on the Astoria condo, go to [www.astoriaon10th.com](http://www.astoriaon10th.com).)

While Arcus is the new kid on the block when it comes to multi-family development in Calgary, I am impressed with its commitment to site specific design.

"We take pride in our architecture and we want our buildings to be signature projects," says Mendyk. "If it costs us a year to get the design right, we will do it."

This is not just lip service.

Arcus completely redesigned its Mondrian condo project next to Grant MacEwan

College in Edmonton after input from that city's urban design committee.

During the past three years, Arcus has secured more than \$70 million in land acquisitions, which represents more than \$900 million in construction projects. Besides Astoria, Arcus Developments has plans for a major, mixed-use Calgary project called Douglas Glen, which will be located next to the future Douglas Glen LRT station on the southeast leg of the LRT.

Very early concepts for this development call for four 28-storey residential towers on a podium of townhouses and retail.

In addition to its Calgary projects, Arcus also has developments in Cochrane, Edmonton, Leduc and Costa Del Sol in Belize.

For more information on Arcus Developments Inc., check out [www.arcusdev.com](http://www.arcusdev.com).

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