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Chicago Multifamily Tower Wins Skyscraper of the Year Award

Design innovations at the Aqua provide visually stunning, wind-mitigating façade.

By: [Chris Wood](#)

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2009 Skyscraper of the Year: Magellan Development's 81-story Aqua features a hotel, condos, apartments, retail, and groundbreaking design by Jeanne Gang of Studio Gang Architects.

Credit: Steve Hall(c)HedrichBlessing

Chicago has eternally been the bane of high-rise residential construction teams—getting up to the top floors of skyscrapers requires the expensive installation of tuned mass dampers to prevent building sway and vibrations, and when it comes to offering penthouse-level amenities and outdoor spaces, forget it. In the case of a groundbreaking façade designed by architect Jeanne Gang of Chicago-based Studio Gang Architects, the story Aqua in Chicago has largely overcome the wind issue in the windiest of cities, just one of the reasons judges in the Skyscraper Award bestowed top honors last month to the mixed-use tower, designed by Magellan Development and James Hugh Construction Co.

True to its name, the Aqua uses flexible mold-formed concrete balconies to create a wave effect across the façade of the building. The balconies, no two of which are similar, require exact placement for both architectural and structural effect, and to ensure accuracies the construction team employed GPS locators to position each mold in the precise location. In addition to aesthetics, the wave effect is practical as well: the undulating façade dissipates wind, allowing for condo units even at the uppermost floors to boast outdoor spaces.

“It’s still a little windy at times,” admits Magellan vice president of development Sean Linnane. “But the views are spectacular. It opens up view corridors to the city in a high-rise application that you otherwise might normally have sitting behind the curtain wall in your living room.”

Linnane says one-of-the-kind features including the tower’s award-winning design and an amenity package that includes a movie theater, spa, yoga garden, indoor and outdoor pools and whirlpools, steam rooms, sauna rooms, game rooms, and a variety of indoor and outdoor decks, gardens, and observation areas. These features have helped to power Aqua property fundamentals on both the for-sale and rental sections of the building in an otherwise down economy.

“We are 90 percent occupied on the apartment side after opening for lease-up last May, and of the 262 condominiums, we are beginning to close and deliver units now, with only 30 or so units left unsold,” Linnane says. Residents in the Aqua’s 474 apartment units enjoy access to the buildings full amenities core, but Linnane says that what the project really has going for it is location.



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Marcus & Millichap's Linwood Thompson and Hessam Nadji discuss apartment market trends, challenges, and

opportunities at the 2009 MFE Conference. Their research presentation offers a compelling look at the industry's key metrics and fundamentals.

“Chicago has had some struggles with apartment occupancy and condominium sales, but our neighborhood here seems to be a little bit insulated from that,” Linnane adds. “We’re immediately adjacent to Grant Park, Millennium Park, the Chicago River and Lake Michigan, right next to the Loop, right next to the Navy Pier, just steps away from Michigan Avenue, and as a project on the whole, we have very little inventory left.”

In addition to the Emporis Award, bestowed annually to the “Skyscraper of the Year,” the Aqua has applied for LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council and is expected to qualify for a LEED Silver designation. A presentation of the Emporis Award will be held at the property later this year—regardless of how windy it is.

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