



# COLORADO REAL ESTATE JOURNAL

THE COMMUNICATION CHANNEL OF THE COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE COMMUNITY

JUNE 3, 2009 – JUNE 16, 2009

## Sustainability and great design

**G**reat design – is it possible without sustainability? These two concepts no longer qualify as trends – they have tipped into the mainstream. Examples of their integration are found everywhere. Of note is the passionate brand loyalty to Apple, the success of Swedish furniture company Ikea and the cachet of owning a Prius.

Sustainability has made significant inroads into the real estate sector. There is now a body of empirical research that quantifies the many benefits. Building owners have reduced operating expenses associated with energy-efficiency measures. Users are more productive and healthier due to daylighting, access to views, ventilation strategies and green material choices. Developers are seeing higher rental rates, increased absorption rates and lower cap rates. Sustainable design has been demystified and green materials are commonplace in the market, resulting in projects that are cost competitive with nongreen buildings.

From a design standpoint, today's sustainable buildings are not your parents' earthships or recycled tire buildings – they are beautiful additions to our communities. The best building designs of today are modern and elegant, carefully integrated with sustainable design,



**Thomas M. Wuertz, AIA, LEED AP**  
Design principal,  
RNL, Denver

producing delightful structures. Their beauty transcends the aesthetic, integrating with function and meaning to create value. Beautiful buildings endure and endurance is one of the hallmarks of sustainable design. The result is a win-win strategy for maximizing return on investment. Examples of such projects in Colorado are growing, reflecting the mainstream integration of design and sustainability.

Set in historic Lower Downtown, 1755 Blake had to meet stringent design guidelines for building height and massing. Design guidelines for LoDo initially seem to limit buildings to four stories so they will match adjacent historic buildings. Sustainable and creative design allowed First Century Development instead to build a five-story building within the height limit. The use of under-floor air distribution combined with a flat plate concrete floor structure reduced the floor-to-floor height to 11 feet, 11 inches on most floors. The

additional 25 percent of rentable space provided a much more valuable real estate asset. Because under-floor systems deliver air at a higher temperature than what's required for a typical overhead system, less energy is used for air-conditioning without compromising individual comfort. The system also improves indoor air quality and provides tenant flexibility over time, mitigating typical "churn" costs as tenants reconfigure the space to meet changing needs. The broad value of design and sustainability to leasing is evident: 1755 Blake was 75 percent leased prior to completion and all office space was leased by the time the building opened.

Westfield Development knew it needed to do something special at 1800 Larimer to distinguish its project in the marketplace. The precertification of the core and shell at LEED Platinum created value. The platinum status was a contributing factor in Xcel Energy's decision to relocate its 340,000-square-foot regional headquarters to the building. Westfield's ability to sign this large tenant in a highly competitive market is a key indicator of the value of sustainability.

The tower is designed based on an extremely efficient floor plate. This gives tenants great efficiency in their leases,

translating to lower costs per employee. The unique façade design creates an easily recognizable building on the skyline that is attractive to tenants. The buildings' expansive landscaped roof garden reduces the amount of heat the building absorbs and reradiates into the atmosphere, and it is a wonderful urban space for tenants to enjoy and a visual respite for those in neighboring buildings.

These are but two examples of the value of design and sustainability. The U.S. Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory campus in Golden is a phenomenal asset for Colorado's new energy economy. The Research Support Facilities building, currently under construction, will be the largest zero-energy building of its kind and another giant leap forward for sustainable design. Xcel Energy's smart grid project in Boulder is another demonstration of Colorado's leadership in sustainability. It is this leadership, in part, that drove ConocoPhillips to locate its new research-and-development campus in Colorado.

For Colorado to continue its leadership, we must continue to raise the bar. Design can add value to our projects, our communities and our clients by leveraging the built environment to create a thriving sustainable future.▲