



CITYSCAPES

A DAILY CHICAGO JOURNAL ABOUT THE BUILDINGS AND URBAN SPACES THAT SHAPE OUR LIVES

BY BLAIR KAMIN

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February 22, 2010

More praise for Aqua: Global building database selects it as 2009's top skyscraper

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Chicago architect Jeanne Gang's Aqua skyscraper continues to reap high praise.

Emporis, the global building database, on Tuesday will name the residential and hotel tower, located in the 200 block of North Columbus Drive and best known for its spectacularly undulating balconies, its 2009 skyscraper of the year.

"Members of the jury praised Aqua for its fascinating shape, whose appearance changes dramatically depending on the perspective. It was also cited as a brilliant technical achievement for the precision of its construction, and lauded as an application of green design innovations to an extremely large building project," Emporis said in a news release.

The honor, known as the Emporis Skyscraper Award, has been given since 2000 and recognizes excellence in aesthetic and functional design.

It has previously gone to such high-rises as Lord Norman Foster's Hearst

Tower in New York City and Santiago Calatrava's Turning Torso Tower in Malmo, Sweden.

This marks the first time that the prize, which is given annually to a building at least 100 meters tall that was completed within the award year, has gone to a Chicago skyscraper.

Chicago's Trump International Hotel & Tower, designed by Chicago architects Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and former SOM partner Adrian Smith, finished fifth in the jury's voting, with 36 points compared to Aqua's 86.

The second prize winner was the O-14 high-rise in Dubai, whose perforated exterior provides a unique shield against the desert sun. (The building was not occupied when I attempted to see it in Dubai last month.)

Emporis editors from 67 countries make nominations for the prize and select the winners. Here are the jury's top results:

Top 10 Skyscrapers of 2009

(rank / building / city / country / points)

1. Aqua, Chicago U.S.A., 86
2. O-14 Dubai U.A.E., 61
3. The Met, Bangkok Thailand, 43
4. Torres de Hércules, Los Barrios Spain, 38
5. Trump International Hotel & Tower, Chicago U.S.A., 36
6. The Red Apple, Rotterdam Netherlands, 34
7. Bank of America Tower, New York City U.S.A., 32
8. Almas Tower, Dubai U.A.E., 16
9. Millennium Tower, San Francisco U.S.A., 13
10. William Beaver House, New York City U.S.A., 10

Posted at 11:11:22 AM

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Hi Blair,

I would be interested in how the scoring is done in terms of ...are certain aspects weighted more than the others or is it strictly like an AP Sports ranking where first place gets 5 pts, Second place 4 pts, etc etc...thanks

Posted by: Rob | February 22, 2010 at 12:24 PM

This is great news and a huge win for Chicago!

Aqua is a stunning building and a magnificent addition to our already exceptional collection of architectural gems.

Well deserved Aqua!

Posted by: J. B. | February 22, 2010 at 01:27 PM

This is outrageous ! With so many innovative high-rise buildings in Chicago, a mediocre building like Aqua is named the 2009 top skyscraper!. I would suggest to the individuals who vote not only to look at photos intentionally taken from specific angles, but also to explore the real building. Then they may be unpleasantly surprised by the discrepancy between image & reality.

This building does not contribute to the Chicago skyline whatsoever; does not have balanced proportions; does not create a pleasant space and interface with the surrounding buildings; the building base is plain ugly etc.

It seems nowadays it does not matter whether someone is a talented architect able to transform ideas into remarkable structures as long as he (she) is a good publicity/ marketing/ sales person.

Posted by: Chicago Resident Architect | February 22, 2010 at 04:42 PM

In reality, this is clumsy bunker box of a building. Its weak attempt at applying (key word here) character comes in the form of a whimsical metaphor – ripple like waves that can only be experienced on by craning your neck on a sunny day. Witness it any other time and its slabs and hulky proportion do not stand tall and proud, but instead look cold and static. Heard of tripartite composition?!?

Take a look at Canadian architect Douglas Cardinal's work. Cardinal has worked his undulating curves over the course of his forty-year career to gain understanding of how one creates beautiful, organic, sculptural work in where the curves are integral, but not applied. After you see Cardinal's work, you will likely see the lack of originality that is being sold to an unformed audience.

This building is gimmicky. It's a one-liner. It will probably never look as good as the images that will bring it recognition from Architectural Record and the AIA Awards. I have serious doubts about it aging gracefully. It's all show and no substance.

Posted by: Zephyr 66 | February 22, 2010 at 06:41 PM

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