

# Designs On Urban Dwelling: A Treasure Unearthed

NEW DESIRE REVITALIZES COMMUNITY

**F**iligree and bright colors give New Orleans its signature look. And the familiar façade is now an integral part of a new housing development being built by the Michaels Development Company of Marlton, New Jersey, for the City of New Orleans.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development is funding the extensive project for mixed-income housing on a 98-acre tract in New Orleans through its Hope VI grant program. The project is known as the New Desire Revitalization Community.

Michaels Development is responsible for a segment of the community that includes 425 rental units. Two other developers are involved in separate parts of the big project.

The McDonnell Group is serving as general contractor for the Phase I-B community, which includes 34 units in 19 buildings. The section of the Michaels Development effort on which The McDonnell Group works takes the name New Treasure Village. Torti Gallas and Partners Architects, Silver Spring, Maryland, designed New Treasure Village.

There's an old and erroneous sentiment, says Tom Gallas, Executive Vice President of Torti Gallas and Partners. It is that "people living in public housing didn't care about where they lived," he explains.

Gallas has never subscribed to such a thought. He believes everyone wants to inhabit a wonderful place. "We tore down very monotonous, faceless housing," he says. "In its place we're building a real neighborhood where everyone has his own address."

Josh Collen, Vice President for Development at Michaels Development in charge of the Southeastern region, says the results of the Torti Gallas and Partners initiative are exciting. "Of all the developments we've worked on, the architecture [on this] is the most attractive, with traditional New Orleans stylistic elements."

Torti Gallas and Partners has a history of designing to harmonize with the beauty in complex cityscapes. It recently won an award from the American Institute of Architects in Washington, D.C., for urban design work.



New Treasure Village features traditional New Orleans Style.

## Change of Pace

“We are known for commercial” work, says Allan McDonnell, President of The McDonnell Group. So it’s gratifying, he explains, to have been “selected above two other contractors that specialize in residential construction.”

Working on a federally funded project put additional demands on all involved. Documenting certifications and completing paper trails take time. But The McDonnell Group took it all in stride. “We are really known for bringing a tremendous amount of information to the table,” says McDonnell.

“It’s nice to be part of something to revitalize part of the community,” says McDonnell. Moreover, The McDonnell Group was able to suggest ways to “value-engineer the project” and help keep the price in line with the budget.

Extracting the most from every dollar has been one part of the equation. Another part is ensuring longevity. Because wood is susceptible to termite and moisture damage, “modern materials that are very durable and require very little maintenance” have been used, says Gallas.

Loreen Arnold, an Associate at Torti Gallas and Partners, worked at bringing those materials to bear to meet the architectural vision. She explains trusses were used for roofs



and floors and panels were used for walls, but the quick installation and reduced maintenance components belie the intricate look of the finished structures.

“We can take budgets with no fluff and produce a very high-quality end product,” says Arnold.


## Big Picture

When the HUD-funded housing is completed in 2005, a vibrant community is expected to take hold. Through its Hope VI grant program, HUD strives to invigorate areas that historically have been distressed both economically and socially.

The mixed income levels among the residences are expected to promote stability, says Collen. The combination of rental and owned units will do the same.

“It’s very rewarding to work on a development that has a catalytic effect on a community,” says Collen. To be sure, everyone working on the New Desire Revitalization Community shares a similar perspective.

The forward-looking view began with the residents of a large, 1,400-unit complex that was demolished to make way for the new community. “Early on,” says Gallas, “we had intensive involvement with residents, to envision what New Desire community would look like.” He says the interaction was a “very positive, very rewarding experience.”

Collen explains that The McDonnell Group was selected as general contractor for New Treasure Village on a hard bid. It’s the first association between Michaels Development and The McDonnell Group. “We’re very excited to be working with McDonnell,” says Collen, adding he hopes it’s the start of more opportunities to work together. 



Every house has a porch.