

# VIEWPOINT

Business First welcomes letters to the editor

## GUEST COMMENT

# Modern design is gaining more local respect

**M**odern design, with its minimal ornamentation and color, is the Rodney Dangerfield of Louisville's architectural styles.

Almost all house construction is of a traditional aesthetic and prominent buildings like Aegon and Humana are admired more than National City and Meidinger towers. Even the American Life Building, designed by modernist icon Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe, is more known for its former "rusty" skin than its famous pedigree.

This lack of preference appears to be lessening with several recent modern additions. The most dramatic impact is the Omni Louisville Hotel. At 30 stories, it's difficult not to notice it.

Usually when a building is announced, the rendering looks better than the final construction, such was the case with the Downtown Marriott, which doesn't resemble at all its initial proposal. The Omni, by HKS of Dallas, though exceeds expectations with its asymmetrical composition and sleek exterior. It is a building that could easily fit in the skyline of Chicago or Atlanta, although it could have had a pastel color on its facade, like the 800 Building.

Rabbit Hole Distillery is definitely not your grandfather's bourbon experience. Doug Pierson, of Pod Architecture, breaks the mode of the classic vintage Kentucky setting.

Rabbit Hole's upscale steel and glass façade is a hip urban facility. On the



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inside, the bourbon is still made the old-fashioned way, but on the outside, it has a futuristic appeal for the next generation of bourbon aficionados.

Not to be outdone, our library system has shed its Carnegie heritage and fast-forwarded into the 21st Century with several progressive regional branches. The residents of Okolona and Dixie Highway areas must wonder what kind of spaceships have landed in their midst. These ultra-cool designs by Minneapolis-based MSR and local JRA Architects have re-energized the image of this once staid institution.

University of Louisville's new Pediatric Care Center resembles a child's colorful building block set. Its eye-catching configuration is distinctive from the surrounding masonry and concrete structures. This project is a collaboration of GBBN and Stanley Beaman Sears/EYP.

The angular glass pedway, which is hidden in the rear courtyard, is a must-see.

Across the Ohio River, in the River

Ridge development, a new office building is not your typical spec structure. With a checkerboard façade of glass and metal, America Place's office there was designed by WHY Architects of Southern California, the same firm that created the Speed Museum's recent modern addition.

While the Omni makes the biggest splash, a number of the other influx of hotels have bold, fresh appearances like the Aloft, Hilton Garden Inn and Marriott's AC Hotel NuLu.

The under-construction Westin and Moxy hotels, at the corner of First and Main streets, also by HKS, will continue this trend with high-profile contemporary aesthetics.

Not to be left behind, there are smaller-sized projects that merit mention. The infill house at 971 Barret Ave., by architect Ted Payne, is an exclamation point on an otherwise nondescript streetscape.

Jeff Rawlins, who is one of the city's innovative designers, juxtaposes new and old with a house addition on Payne at Angora Court. And, Nathan Smith turned a century-old shotgun on Sixth Street, near York Street, into an artistic jewel.

Louisvillians still love their classical revival styles of Tudor, Italianate and Romanesque. With this wave of modernist projects, this style may now be gaining more local respect.

And, all of these varied styles compose an eclectic architectural mosaic that continues to make Louisville one of America's best places in which to live. **Z**