



arthur andersson
& chris wise

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ALTHOUGH ARCHITECTS ARTHUR ANDERSSON AND CHRIS WISE MET AS ADULTS, THEIR LIVES HAVE ALWAYS RUN IN CLOSE PARALLEL. AS LITTLE BOYS, THEY DREAMED OF PLAYING IN THE MAJOR LEAGUES. AS ADOLESCENTS, THEY DISCOVERED A NATURAL GIFT FOR DRAWING—A TALENT THAT WOULD TRIGGER THEIR ENTRY INTO ARCHITECTURE. EARLY IN THEIR CAREERS, FORTUITOUS CIRCUMSTANCES LED THEM BOTH TO COLLABORATIONS WITH THE LEGENDARY CHARLES MOORE. TODAY, AS CO-FOUNDING PRINCIPALS OF ANDERSSON-WISE ARCHITECTS, THE TWO MEN SHARE THE AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY OF GIVING SHAPE AND FORM TO THE MUCH-ANTICIPATED BLOCK 21 PROJECT IN THE HEART OF AUSTIN'S 2ND STREET DISTRICT.

When Andersson and Wise began tossing around ideas for the Block 21 development, their first move wasn't to sketch a building. Instead, they carved out a space for a 10,000-square-foot outdoor plaza. Explains Andersson: "The tour de force of Austin's architecture is its open spaces. We have some phenomenal outdoor 'rooms' right in the center of town—places like Town Lake and the hike-and-bike trail. Designing an outdoor plaza for Block 21 just seemed like a natural starting point."

This keen awareness of context is perhaps the keystone of all Andersson-Wise designs. From churches to university halls to private residences, their national portfolio of work echoes Moore's influential tenet that architecture is about enhancing a sense of place. Good design involves careful consideration of local history and culture, neighboring structures, sun orientation, and climate. But make no mistake: blending isn't the entire goal. As Moore loved to say, "Architecture is the choreography of the familiar and the surprising."

"I recently heard Roger Bowen, the headmaster of St. Stephen's, say that buildings are simply frames in which people live," Wise says. "We try to frame the environment we are in. Modern buildings traditionally are so much about sealing off the exterior. We are about creating strong relationships between indoor and outdoor spaces." In a town that is often described as "a city within a park," Andersson and Wise seem the perfect pair to design Block 21, a vacant lot that sits directly north of City Hall between Lavaca and Guadalupe streets. Andersson is the partner-in-charge for Block 21 and will spearhead the project concept and direct the design. Slated for completion in 2009, the nearly 800,000-square-

foot tract will be home to the new *Austin City Limits* headquarters and recording studio, the Dell Discovery Austin Children's Museum, an upscale W Hotel, luxury condominiums, and a diverse selection of retail shops and restaurants.

Once the architects mapped out a comfortable plaza for the southeast corner, they began thinking about the major users of the development. They arranged the various components in such a way that there will be no "back doors" to the property. They are collaborating with Gardens owners James David and Bill Bauer. At ground level, the development will resemble a gigantic "L"—with a low-lying, four-story structure to the south and about a 30-story tower rising from the north. Because City Hall is a comparatively low-lying structure, the tower's occupants will enjoy beautiful views of Town Lake.

"We liken the tower to a cliff dwelling; it's designed so that in the summer, shade is maximized by the balconies, and in the winter, it gets the full benefit of the sun's rays," Andersson says. "And the breezes off of Town Lake will act as a natural cooling system for the building."

"Cool" is an apt descriptor. Lushly landscaped gardens will bedeck every rooftop of the LEED-accredited development, making it a 70 percent "green site." This will help to offset the "heat island effect" created by concrete jungles, as well as preserve air quality and reduce storm-water runoff.

"The lower-terrace rooftop is as large as a football field. It creates a phenomenal palette to design many outdoor rooms," Andersson says. "Austin promotes a culture that lives both

indoors and outdoors. That idea, combined with the need to create a building that is truly sustainable, became central to our design. We don't want to build something for the next 20 or 30 years; we want to build something for the next 200 years." The architects are working closely with the Center for Maximum Potential Building Systems to bring their vision to life. Along with selecting native vegetation for outdoor areas, Andersson and Wise have chosen native building materials, such as Lueders limestone, and environmentally friendly products, such as corrosion-resistant Cor-Ten steel and precast concrete with fly ash. Concrete with fly ash requires less cement and, in turn, reduces cement production—a huge energy consumer.

"We hope to create a building that is emblematic of the spirit of Austin, not only in its use but also in the way it's conceived to work with the environment," says Andersson, who is still finalizing the development's finer details with Wise and the various parties involved in Block 21.

The longtime colleagues agree that it simultaneously feels like a "gift" and a "huge responsibility" to design Block 21. "With all these different pieces to the project—the museum, the hotel, Austin City Limits, and so forth—we wanted to give each its autonomy, but design them in such a way that they reinforce each other," Andersson explains. "In architecture, you simply can't ignore what has come before. We also saw an opportunity to embrace the liturgy and make connections with other buildings. When you do this, there's a gestalt that happens, and the individual pieces become bigger than themselves." KF