

Atlantic Station breathes life into brownfield

Wakefield Beasley & Associates

Many architects talk about urban renewal. Atlantic Station is an urban re-creation in the heart of midtown Atlanta.

Atlantic Station's developers wanted a SoHo-like neighborhood on an abandoned steel mill site. But architecture firm Wakefield Beasley & Associates had to create The District, the downtown heart, in the face of logistical challenges.



"The buildings come off like they have been built over time," said Matt Mastin, a managing principal at Norcross, Ga.-based Wakefield Beasley. "There's a rhythm here that clearly emulates a progression of design and construction."

The District consists of 20 new city blocks on 30 acres over an underground, 7,000-car garage — and manages to look

as though it has always been there. That was the goal for Jacoby Development and AIG Global Real Estate, the project's developers, and Wakefield Beasley, which designed the retail core based on a schematic design originally developed by Design Development Group, Baltimore.

"We asked them to come up with something big for us," said Brian Leary, vice president of both Atlantic Station, LLC, and Atlanta-based Jacoby Development.

Atlantic Station is big. The community, built on 138 acres at the nexus of interstates 75 and 85, is a redevelopment of the former Atlantic Steel Mill. In addition to 811,000 square feet of retail space, the District has about 6 million square feet of office space, town homes, public parks and an Ikea. This new "neighborhood" still had to integrate seamlessly into the existing city.

Wakefield Beasley created the neighborhood's downtown shopping area, working around and linking to existing infrastructure, including the garage, designed by others.

"It feels like you're coming out of the New York City subway," Mastin said.

The architect and developer spent time in other regentrifying neighborhoods, including New York City's SoHo and Denver's LoDo to find the secrets to their success.

"It works because of the scale and the way our retailers have

addressed the street," Leary said. "But one challenge for us was how to serve those retailers."

Loading docks were located underground, allowing an uninterrupted series of street retail.

The steel mill is recalled throughout the District, which consists of 12 retail buildings topped with residential lofts or office space. The shells resemble old warehouses that have been built at different times, with large windows. The sizes of the buildings vary, with some consisting of one floor of retail topped with two or three loft residential levels. Others have two levels of retail topped by lofts. The predominantly brick building exteriors are enlivened considerably with yellows and greens.

"Each building has a different architectural style," Mastin said. Those include art deco, and the overall impression is of an old, redeveloping neighborhood.

Brick sidewalks, asphalt streets, traffic lights and parking meters add to the urban look. The District is situated over a garage, and planters were brought in for trees. A one-acre central park anchored by restaurants provides a gathering space.

The first retailers, among them Banana Republic, Dillard's, Fox Sports Grill, a Publix supermarket, a 16-screen Regal cinema and a Rosa Mexicano, opened in October. At press time about 70 percent of the retail was operating, with more tenants opening regularly.

"We are not a site that's in the middle of nowhere," said Leary. "We are part of the urban fabric. This is a place that looks like it has been here for years and evolved." ■

