

iStar surprises again in Asbury

LEADING MIAMI ARCHITECTURE FIRM DESIGNS LATEST WATERFRONT PROJECT

ASBURY PARK — Now we're talking.

Master waterfront redeveloper iStar Financial has proposed yet another waterfront project showing a commitment to high-quality architecture and design. It's a 34-unit residential development, the second phase of the block in which the first phase is a conformist Hovnanian project that made us explode in fury at iStar for bringing it here.

That Hovnanian controversy is now well in the rear-view mirror as iStar surprises us yet again. The new project — for which plans were just filed with the city and a meeting with the Technical Review Committee is scheduled for this month — is designed by Oppenheim Architecture + Design, a leading firm out of Miami. The site is diagonally across from Wesley Grove at the corner of Cookman, Monroe and Heck.

Check out the Oppenheim firm's website at Oppenoffice.com. This is the world-class talent we've always demanded for our city. It comes after iStar earlier this summer unveiled a stunner — their 110-unit boutique hotel project at the long-vacant Salvation Army building, a landmark on Kingsley Street and Fifth Avenue. It's designed by Manhattan-based architects Stonehill and Taylor, who specialize in hotel conversions in historic buildings. They were the architects on the acclaimed Ace and NoMad hotels up in the city, among other high-profile projects.

If this is where iStar is going — and it appears to be the case — all is forgiven for the Hovnanian project, which will be quickly overshadowed by the much higher quality design of these other projects.

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below: iStar's latest proposed project is designed by Oppenheim Architecture + Design in Miami



This latest iStar project also comes just as the downtown business district has moved to a similarly high level of architecture and design. We reported about it last week, noting the recent projects to build a clam bar/chowder house in the Steinbach's building where it points east, as well as the beer garden on Lake Avenue, the new Taka on Cookman and Pascal and Sabine and Goldie's from the Smith group.

With those downtown projects, along with iStar's boutique hotel project and now this 34-unit residential proposal, our city is attracting architecture and design talent as good as it gets anywhere. And that will draw even more high quality architecture as design excellence becomes the accepted standard in our city. For example, a residential project on Memorial Drive west of the railroad station, designed by Hoboken and Asbury based architect Rob Feinstein and proposed by Asbury developer Trip Brooks, deservedly got rave reviews from the Zoning Board of Adjustment when it was approved last month.

But back to iStar's latest proposal, located between Sewall and Monroe avenues and a block off Cookman. The only thing they've got to change is the name — the Monroe condominiums. We assume that's just a starting point and they'll come up with something better. The project will share the block with that 28-unit Hovnanian conformist garbage.

iStar itself is developing the Monroe condominiums project — they're not bringing in any Hovnanians. And why should they? It only adds another layer of complications which cuts into the revenue and makes the project that much more expensive.

Based on iStar's hotel plans for the Salvation Army building, and now this Monroe condominiums residential project, they should do more of these projects themselves, which is so much more cost-effective. While we've blasted iStar for the Hovnanian project, we've always said their top person in Asbury — Vice President of Land Brian Cheripka — is a quality individual with the ability and experience to oversee projects like the boutique hotel and now the Monroe condominiums. It certainly seems that iStar is finding its groove

The Monroe project will first go the Technical Review Committee, which is an advisory subcommittee of the Planning Board. The project will then require Planning Board and City Council approval.

The triCity-affiliated asburyparksun.com will do the nitty-gritty reporting of the approval process at those boards. That's too much work for the Sun's lazy cousins here at the triCityNews.

But here're the general features of this Monroe condominiums project, as described in iStar's application submitted to the city:

It will be one, two and three-bedroom units in a three to four story building that "furthers the contemporary oceanfront urbanism of the Asbury Park waterfront." The project will provide "a prominent architectural presence" at the convergence of Heck Street, Monroe Avenue and Cookman Avenue. [We love that iStar is now using terms like "contemporary oceanfront urbanism" and "prominent architectural presence." And they're right to do so with this project. You couldn't do that with a straight face with that Hovnanian project.]

A continuous streetwall building can be provided on all three sides of the frontage of the project, as the parking will be in the rear. The street-facing facades of the project will be "a composite wood cladding system framed by simulated stone panel elements." Each unit will have a private "outdoor room" for dining and lounging which will be recessed in the street-facing facades.

Roof-top terraces will be provided for each unit on the top floor, which will feature outdoor kitchens. A common outdoor deck will be located above the third story on Sewall Avenue. Residents will have enclosed green space on the ground floor to soften up the hardscape and all the street-facing windows will be operable.

"All of these elements contribute to a visually interesting building that encourages interplay between the public and private realms and creates an inviting atmosphere for pedestrians," the application stated.

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have to miss out on the surfing festivities. SEA FILMS hits the Paramount Theatre (1300 Ocean Ave) from September 12 to 13.

As excellent as surf videos are, this festival seeks to provide a little more. The films screened have social and cultural impact, and transform the spiritual connection with the water into a variety of stories, both fictionalized and documentary-style.

SEA FILMS starts with Lightly Salted' Surf Mercado's Free Surf Films on the Beach at 2nd Ave on September 12. It starts with "Beyond the Surface" at 7 p.m., a film following Ishita Malaviya — India's first female surfer — and a group of talented women as they travel through Southern India documenting the ways in which surfing, yoga, and ecological creativity are bringing hope and fueling change for local people and the planet.

At 8 p.m. the story of Aussie surfing legend Wayne Lynch is told in "Uncharted Waters," celebration the 1960's icon, revolutionary, and pioneer of a new vertical style.

The film series continues on September 13 with a pre-party and concert starting at 3 p.m. in Convention Hall's the Anchor's Bend, before moving back to the Paramount at 5 p.m. for "A Life Outside," a more local tale about six surfers who pioneered the scene in Seaside Heights in the 1960's (surfing in freezing water before wetsuits existed, it bears pointing out).

The must-see film of the night is the 9 p.m. screening of "Death 2 Hipsters," a title which has no relevance to Asbury, nope, not at all. Directed by Alex DelPhillipo, the outrageous surf comedy was named Viewers' Choice at Surf and Skate Cologne. It features appearances by New Jersey pros like Andrew Gesler, Rich McMullin, Sam Hammer, Rob Kelly, Mike Gleason, and Clay Pollioni. Worldwide stars like Bruce Irons, Flynn Novak, Christian Fletcher and Kalani Chapman are also along for the zany ride.

Check out a full schedule (with included after-parties, of course) at ap-boardwalk.com. For more Belmar Pro indo visit www.belmarpro.com.

