

Petronas' architects tapped for S.A. tower



Joshua Paul / Associated Press

Pelli Clarke Pelli, which calls this modernistic pagoda-style Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, its signature project, has been selected as the architects of Weston Urban's downtown office tower project.

Firm called right fit; native of the city to lead project

By Benjamin Olivo
STAFF WRITER

Weston Urban, the local developer planning downtown's first office tower since the 1980s, has selected New England architecture firm Pelli Clarke Pelli to design the envisaged structure at the northwest corner of Houston and North Flores streets.

The firm is known for designing the modernistic pagoda-style Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and the Aria Resort and Casino in Las Vegas.

And although the firm is from New Haven, Connecticut, a San Antonio native will lead the design team.

Bill Butler, design principal

at Pelli Clarke Pelli, was born at the Nix hospital in 1957 and grew up in the Alamo City before his family relocated to New Orleans.

He said it's too early to discuss architectural style or even the height of the \$142 million building — those conversations have yet to happen among Pelli Clarke Pelli, Frost Bank (the tower's primary tenant), Weston Urban and co-developer KDC of Dallas. The design process is expected to take a year.

Butler says for this project, designing a tower that will serve as Frost Bank's headquarters, it's important the building have the right impact on the skyline as well as the street.



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"San Antonio at this point could use a response for both of those scales," Butler said.

Butler called the 2.8-acre property, an entire city square block, "unusually large."

"That's a plus, because it allows you to accommodate the scale of a multitenant building, the parking garage and, hopefully, have enough active street

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retail," he said.

He also pointed to its proximity to the San Pedro Creek — a parking lot away to the west — and the greensward flanking the property to the east, which Weston Urban plans to convert into a more functional park.

Irby Hightower, founding principal at Alamo Architects, the local firm on the design team, also pointed out that the site is along Houston Street, San Antonio's former retail hub, and Flores Street, which traverses downtown north to south.

Weston Urban President Randy Smith said 10 architecture firms participated in the

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competition, and five were asked for proposals. Smith declined to name the other firms.

All the interested firms were capable of designing the tower, Smith said, but in the end, Pelli Clarke Pelli was the right fit for the project.

"We were not looking for someone to show up with a design and pull a sheet off it and say ta da!" Smith said. "That's the exact wrong way to go about it."

"In the front of our minds was: Who's the cultural fit? Who's the personal fit? And, really, what is their process like? How do they think about design?"

The firm also was recently



Associated Press file photo

Pelli Clarke Pelli also designed the Aria Resort and Casino in Las Vegas.

selected to design the Shraman South Asia Museum in Dallas.

The Frost Bank tower is the centerpiece of a complex land-swap deal between Weston Urban, Frost Bank and the city of San Antonio — one that involves the city consolidating 1,200 downtown-area workers into Frost's current headquarters at 100 W. Houston St.

The city will invest more than \$80 million — \$51 million to buy the current Frost Tower and the attached parking garage, and \$32 million to upgrade the building. City officials have said the deal will yield a \$1.2 million net savings over the 30 years of the debt.

Construction of the tower is expected to begin in fall 2016, with a completion date in 2018 or 2019.

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