

# ARCHITECTURE and the URBAN LANDSCAPE with The Plain Dealer's Steven Litt

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## University Circle townhouses would set a new tone for Cleveland's cultural district

Posted by [Steven Litt/Plain Dealer Architecture Critic](#) April 22, 2008 14:15PM

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East 118th and Euclid Perspective  
 Circle 118  
 Euclid Ave. & East 118th St.  
 Cleveland, Ohio

RDL Architects

A perspective view along Euclid Avenue at East 118th Street in Cleveland depicts 17 townhouses designed by RDL Architects of Shaker Heights.

The new direction for housing in Cleveland's University Circle district is decidedly contemporary.

A bold, colorful proposal for 17 new townhouses at East 118th Street and Euclid Avenue got a unanimous thumbs-up from the University Circle Design Review Committee on April 3.

"It was very well received," said Chris Bongorno, associate planner for [University Circle Inc.](#), the area's nonprofit planning agency.

The townhouses will be the first thing motorists see as they enter University Circle from the east and pass under the railroad bridge just east of the site. As such, they'll act as a gateway to Cleveland's medical and cultural district.

Their design anticipates bigger projects now in the works in the immediate vicinity, including the University Arts and Retail District.

Developers Nathan Zaremba and Richard and Ari Maron are expected soon to unveil designs for hundreds of apartments in the district by Office dA of Boston and Stanley Saitowitz/Natoma Architects of San Francisco.

Meanwhile, [WXZ Development Inc.](#) of Fairview Park has beaten Zaremba and the Marons to the punch by being the first company to seek approval for new housing in a highly desirable portion of University Circle.

Steven Avner, marketing director for the company, said it hopes to break ground this summer, but that the firm doesn't yet have construction costs or asking prices for the townhouses.

He's anticipating heavy demand, despite the railroad tracks to the east.

He described the units as "upscale," with high-quality interior finishes, but declined to give specifics.

The design, created by [RDL Architects](#) of Shaker Heights, calls for rows of three-story units flanking a central parking lot and communal outdoor space.

The townhouses, containing either one or two bedrooms, will have two-car garages accessible from the rear, plus rooftop terraces.

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The 17 townhouses designed by RDL Architects for University Circle would be grouped around a central court with off-street access to garages.

Together, the units will form a sawtooth row along the Euclid Avenue sidewalk, with protruding corners facing south to capture daylight.

The structures will be built primarily in red brick, accented with bright blue and red panels of a dense plastic-and-wood fiber material called Trespa.

RDL's other projects in Cleveland include the forward-looking Lakepointe residential development in Cleveland's Detroit Shoreway neighborhood and the less convincing Montana homes at East 30th Street and Prospect Avenue, which affect a meager-looking traditionalism.

The firm designs interiors for Arhaus Furniture stores, and has specialized in designing housing for seniors across Pennsylvania.

Paul Glowacki, who designed the University Circle project with RDL colleagues Ron Lloyd and Marko Lukowsky, said the firm decided on a contemporary approach because the designers knew their efforts would be compared with those by other architects in the neighborhood.

In addition to the housing designed by Office dA and Saitowitz, the University Arts and Retail District will include a new home for the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, designed by Farshid Moussavi of Foreign Office Architects in London, and an expansion of the nearby McCullough Center of the Cleveland Institute of Art, designed by Winy Maas of MVRDV in the Netherlands.

"Those are very forward-thinking groups," Glowacki said.

Glowacki, 28, said RDL Architects is trying to incorporate environmentally friendly features in the townhouses, but isn't sure whether WXZ wants to apply for certification under the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED program, short for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.

University Circle has been the scene of warring architectural styles in recent years. The Case Western Reserve University campus features an explosive-looking business school by Frank Gehry, but the university made an abrupt about-face in 2005 when it built a Collegiate Gothic dormitory complex called the Village at 115.

Now it appears that much of what's being designed for the area will look forward, not back. If it gets started this summer as predicted, the WXZ/RDL project will be one of the first to set the new tone.

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