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SCULPTING DOWNTOWN

Developer Molasky commissions city's first art installation at Bank of America

By NICK HALEY
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Like the city itself, a new sculpture in front of the Bank of America building in downtown Las Vegas reflects an ever-rising optimism toward commerce and growth.

Rising like woody vines from the landscape that surrounds it, "Upward Trends" by Nicholas Price drew a range of responses from the crowd of city elders, bank employees and denizens of nearby offices who attended the recent unveiling of the publicly displayed outdoor sculpture - the first of its kind downtown - on a cool, windless December evening. The piece comprises interweaving stainless-steel poles topped with ornate arrows - most pointing upward - placed amid the fresh landscaping that frames a sitting area outside the office tower facing Fourth Street. Complementary components greet bank patrons leaving the elevators of the adjacent parking garage.



"I designed it to have a kinetic feel. I create all of my work to have a living feel, to be growing, to be alive, hence its presence among the plants in the landscaping as opposed to on a pedestal or step," Price said. "I want it to be a part of the environment and an enrichment of the cultural experience of the city."

The unveiling capped off a \$1.3 million renovation of the Bank of America



building funded by developer Irwin Molasky, who conceived of the public art display to reflect "the downtown area as a whole." Following Nathan Adelson Hospice on Swenson Street, it is the second building this year to which Molasky has added a work of art by Price.

"This is another example of combining good architecture with good art. (The Bank of America tower) is a piece of art, so it's fitting that we add to this building a sculpture from an artist such as Nicholas Price," Molasky said.

Molasky, a longtime advocate of city redevelopment, said the renovation project represented several elements long missing from downtown including inviting gathering places and a cultural dimension.

"Artwork was the missing stone in the emerald necklace," Molasky said. "We are proud to set the tone for future artwork in the downtown area."

Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman, who has spent the past few years trying to entice artist and new investors to establish a presence in the area, said the public art display fits with the city government's plans for adding to the complexion of downtown. When a battery of floodlights turned on at the debut, somewhat enigmatically he said - apparently to himself - "It's started."

"This is so symbolic - I really mean that - of what we are trying to accomplish in downtown Las Vegas," Goodman said.

(Public art) is what makes a city's identity. This is what shows the rest of the country we have brains, culture ... It represents the essence of the city, and cities that don't have art are sterile and lifeless.

"Art stimulates our environment. It makes a statement: This is where our creative juices flow. Without art, it's just an empty, barren desert."

He went on to praise Molasky for funding the project and helping to establish downtown as a place for people to gather and as a patron of the arts. In addition to originally developing the site, Molasky has improved the tower incrementally over the years with

Photo
Plaza
adjoin

Photo
to the



modern elevators, the addition of a Starbucks outlet, fresh landscaping and most recently the artwork.

Price, who himself once worked in the finance industry, said the artwork brings together the building with its environment, and softens the sober appearance of the lending institution. Sitting at one of the newly installed patio tables outside of the bank's coffee vendor, Price admired the inviting nature of the patio as something downtown was lacking. For most residents, the area is largely just a place of business.

"This plaza is one of the only areas downtown where you actually sit down outside and stay," Price said.

"I wanted to provide a sculpture that would unify a public presence with a private venture, and take away from the imposing image of conformity of the building, and of banking."

For the bank's many visitors and the occasional employee who steps out for a smoke, he hopes the structure and its accompanying plaque offer something to ponder for a moment.

Price's wife, Grace, who also has a history in the finance industry, said the city's goal of cultivating a downtown arts district requires support from landowners and developers such as Molasky to succeed.

"The downtown arts movement is something the city has spent money on trying to encourage. That is something you only accomplish with support and sponsorship of the private sector," she said. "We hope this piece of artwork will reflect the new city they're creating, and also that it reflect the direction of the community, which is always building upward and rebuilding."

Upward Trends was also featured in a four-page article in Luxury Las Vegas Magazine.



