

World-renowned architects designing Austin high-rise

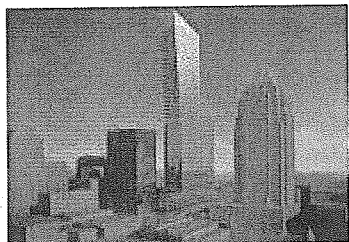
Tower at Fifth and Congress could be city's tallest.

By Shonda Novak
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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A renowned architectural firm that created one of the world's tallest buildings is designing what could become Austin's tallest high-rise — a sleek, flared glass tower that would dramatically alter downtown's skyline.

The mixed-use tower being designed by Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects is set to rise 47 stories on the northeast corner of Fifth Street and Congress Avenue, next to the 26-story Bank of America building. Senior principals Cesar Pelli and Fred Clarke and firm principal Bill Butler will lead the



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The proposed 47-story high-rise for the northeast corner of Fifth Street and Congress Avenue would sit between the 26-story Bank of America building and the Frost Bank Tower.

Austin developer Tom Stacy plans to break ground by mid-2007.

The City of Austin Planning Commission recommended a zoning change Tuesday to Stacy to build a tower with more than 1 million square feet. Planning Commissioner praised the project for its "vision and audacity."

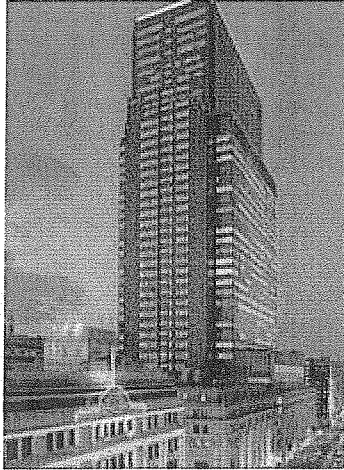
The zoning request next goes to the City Council, which has the final say.

The Fifth & Congress tower — preliminarily named after its location — is one in a string of designs for the architectural firm.

It designed the landmark twin 89-story Petronas Towers in Malaysia, which soared 1,411 feet. It was the tallest structure in the world when it was built in 1998. It's now the second-tallest.

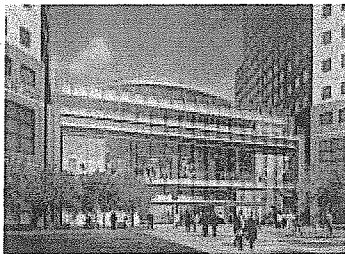
Other projects designed by the New Haven, Conn.-based firm include the Museum of Modern Art Tower in New York, the 41-story Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Tokyo, the Rea National Airport and the 31-story Torre Libertad tower in Mexico City.

Both Clarke and Butler have Texas ties: Clarke is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, and Butler is a San Antonio native and a Rice University graduate.



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(enlarge photo)
The Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Tokyo has 41 stories.



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Cesar Pelli is the creator of the design for the New York's World Financial Center and Winter Garden, shown in this artist's rendering.

They, along with Cesar Pelli, also worked on projects at Rice University and the main UT campus.

For the Fifth & Congress tower, Stacy's instructions to the architects were straightforward: "Build me the prettiest building you can for this site," said Elizabeth Christian, a spokeswoman.

Said Stacy: "These guys have been developing buildings for the past 20 years, and I have the opportunity to bring that experience, creativity and expertise to Austin."

The result will be a high-rise that is "a world-class building molded to fit the culture, preferences and desires of the Austin community," Stacy said. "This is not New York City, Malaysia or Dubai. The project has to embrace the vision of the community for that location." Preliminary plans for the tower to rise up to 700 feet, housing 925,000 square feet of condominiums, retail space, offices or a hotel. The building could be in a rivalry for the title of the city's tallest: another project plans a condominium tower several blocks away that also could be up to 700 feet tall.

Stacy plans 180 to 200 condominiums priced at \$500 to \$600 a square foot, putting the average unit at 1,150 square feet, at up to almost \$700,000 — in line with many of downtown's newest condos. The top floors, starting above the height of the Bank of America tower, will be reserved for luxury condos.

Included in the project is a 12-story parking garage with 1,200 spaces at Fifth and Brazos. Stacy hopes to start construction on it later this year. Even though it is recommended to build the tower, the Planning Commission postponed action on the garage to explore concerns of nearby residents of the Brazos Lofts.

Stacy said he is considering putting moderately priced apartments atop the garage, but that may not be economically feasible because of downtown's high land prices.