

READERS FORUM

Architects have much to offer Vision 2025

By **BRIAN L. FREESE**

Tulsa, a city built by energy, is now in a serious energy drought. In its youth Tulsa exploded with exponential growth once it established itself as the epicenter of the petroleum industry, then the latest energy technology of the time.

The builders of this city were pure energy as well — bold, brash and most of all, fearlessly creative. Even the buildings they constructed and helped fund were buildings “of the moment,” structures that utilized the very latest in building and construction technology, and that artfully reflected the current advancements and sensibilities of our local and national cultures. The creative energy that pulsed through this young Midwestern city in the 1920s through the 1960s fueled Tulsa’s position as a truly progressive city.

Our local economy was devastated by events of the 1970s and 1980s and Tulsa was dethroned as a destination city for the oil business. What we also lost during that time, and to date have not fully reclaimed, was our en-



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ergy of boldness and creative thinking.

This loss is not due to a lack of creative thinkers. Tulsa is blessed with an abundance of creative people in all disciplines. Unfortunately, those in creative fields, including architects, are not exempt from the affliction of creative timidity in response to a community lacking self-confidence and collective vision of its “reason for being.”

As well trained as architects are supposed to be in the skill of thinking and responding from our own creative gut, we too can fall into the trap of mimicking a locally ubiquitous and safe architectural style, rather than to

creatively stretch with the client to design a truly individual solution.

Architects (among others) have such a huge amount of value to give to humanity at all levels, but only so long as we deliver our professional services and ideas with utmost honesty, integrity, and from our own bold and fearless creative core. As architects, our greatest value lies in our very (more) different way of thinking and processing information to arrive at unique solutions.

If more architects were to engage those ingrained skills, and with the talent I know exists among us, I can envision ways in which local architects could help to rediscover our huge communal creative energy and boldness:

▶ A new form of architecture unique to this city should once again emerge: a form of architecture that uses the most advanced building and engineering technologies. It should express the essence of the urban Midwest in simple, bold and contemporary forms combined with local natural materials. It should artfully define the accumulated knowledge and pre-

sent day attitudes and sensibilities of our local culture. Art Deco architecture accomplished those things in Tulsa many decades ago. This new form of architecture should not be Art Deco revisited, but instead should be as bold, fearless, and current today as Art Deco was then.

▶ We should be pivotal and prominent in assisting Mayor Bill LaFortune with the revitalization and redevelopment of Tulsa and Tulsa County. I am speaking particularly about this AIA chapter and its members at all levels. Our unique combination of talents and specific training are such that we as a collective force, along with our associate members and affiliate members, are particularly well suited to play a major role in organizing and implementing Tulsa Vision 2025.

▶ We can take our recent successes in community and civic volunteerism to a completely new level. Our collective expertise and knowledge are invaluable in designing affordable housing types, assisting in neighborhood and community planning efforts, and in supporting our local and coun-

ty appointed authorities, boards and commissions.

Tulsa’s current struggle to redefine itself cannot be done mechanically. If we simply regurgitate what other cities have done in their own process of rebuilding themselves, we will fall short. We must dig deep within ourselves as a community and find those essential elements that truly define this place called Tulsa.

Of most importance, this is our great opportunity to rediscover and engage the indomitable creative energy that took Tulsa to a position of greatness many years ago, and an effort in which Tulsa’s architectural community must be an essential component. Architects have a huge untapped deposit of fresh creative energy to invest. And right now, Tulsa could benefit from some fresh creative energy — some bold, fearless, untamed creative energy.

Brian L. Freese, AIA, is principal of Brian Lloyd Freese Architecture, Tulsa. He has twice served as president of The American Institute of Architects, Eastern Oklahoma Chapter.