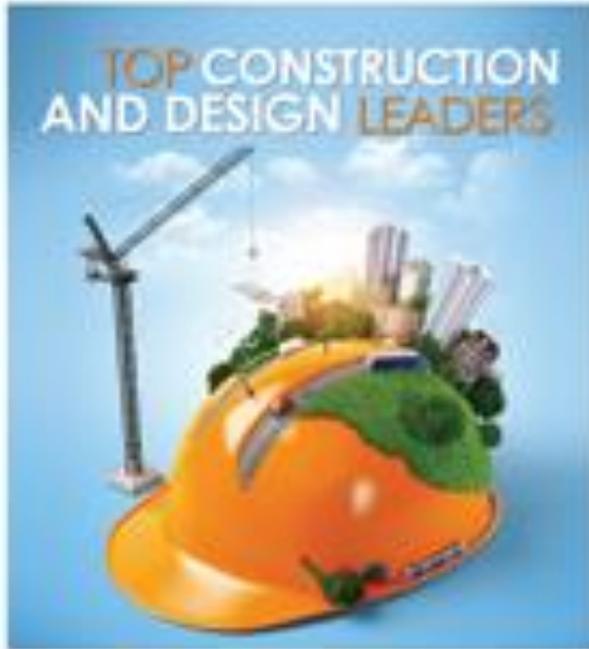


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TOP CONSTRUCTION
AND DESIGN LEADERS



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Douglas H. Austin



Since he was a little kid, Austin said, he's had a passion for bringing architectural visions to life. "Now I get to do it," he added. His latest project, in his new partnership with Skyport Studios, is work on Seaport San Diego, the proposed \$1.2 billion redevelopment of the city's Central Embarcadero. AVR Studios - begun by Austin, Christopher T. Veum and Randy Robbins 40 years ago - merged with Frank Wolden's Skyport in September. The regional firms joined forces to leverage their expertise and energy on what Austin called the most significant urban waterfront project in the city.

"We started working together on this about two years ago," Austin said of his collaboration with Skyport on the waterfront venture. He said the project design is currently favored 6-1 by the city's Port of San Diego commissioners; a final green light is expected in November.

The proposal calls for a 2.2 million square foot development on 40 acres of land and 30 acres of water. It will replace the current aging Seaport Village with a mix of hotels, shops and restaurants, a public beach, an aquarium, a charter high school, and a 480-foot observation tower to be called The Spire. Smithsonian Enterprises, the business and media offshoot of the Smithsonian Institution, plans virtual reality and augmented reality attractions.

"We did some early sketches with an East Coast developer and an aquarium developer," Austin said. "We then started meeting with the Gafcon team, fishermen, port officials and others to talk about how to make something that works to connect the waterfront to the rest of the city. Finally, when the port issued a [request for proposal], we were ready because we'd been thinking about it for a long time.

"It's both frustrating because it's taking so long and exciting because it's really happening. We've been around long enough to understand the process, and we admire the port's courage. There are a lot of players: lenders, institutions like the Smithsonian and even the Midway Museum is interested - they may want in."

Well known for his urban environment design expertise, Austin was appointed by San Diego's mayor to chair the task force overseeing the new ballpark and Ballpark District. He also served as vice chair of the city's redevelopment agency. He is currently on the San Diego Planning Commission.

For Austin, the recipient of more than 135 design awards over a long career, the project caps his lifelong ambition. "I started young. Now I'm old and loving what's happening here," he said.

- John Roemer

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