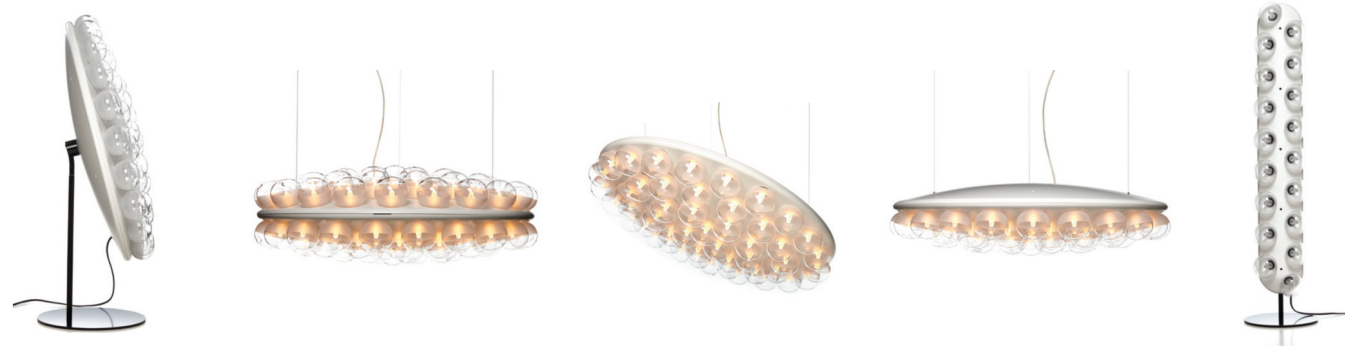


# Prop Light

by Bertjan Pot "Design is too complex for one liners."



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## SEARS TOWN REDUX

GLAVOVIC STUDIO REIMAGINES A FORT LAUDERDALE LANDMARK  
FOR AN EVOLVING CITY

Text Jillian Whitaker Renderings Glavovic Studio



DON'T REBUILD. REIMAGINE. This was the assignment *HOME Fort Lauderdale* tasked five South Florida architects with nearly a decade ago for the dynamic downtown site we call Sears Town. When the shopping center opened in 1955, its design by Robert Law Weed was cutting-edge and contemporary — a bold vision for modern life in Fort Lauderdale. Set in between North Federal Highway and Sunrise Boulevard, its sweeping curved canopies and glass curtain walls celebrated this intersection. Weed was also responsible for such progressive buildings as the “Florida Tropical Home,” built for the 1933 World’s Fair in Chicago, and the landmark Burdine’s in Miami Beach. His design for Sears Town was so striking, it was photographed by the 20th century’s finest architectural photographer, Ezra Stoller.

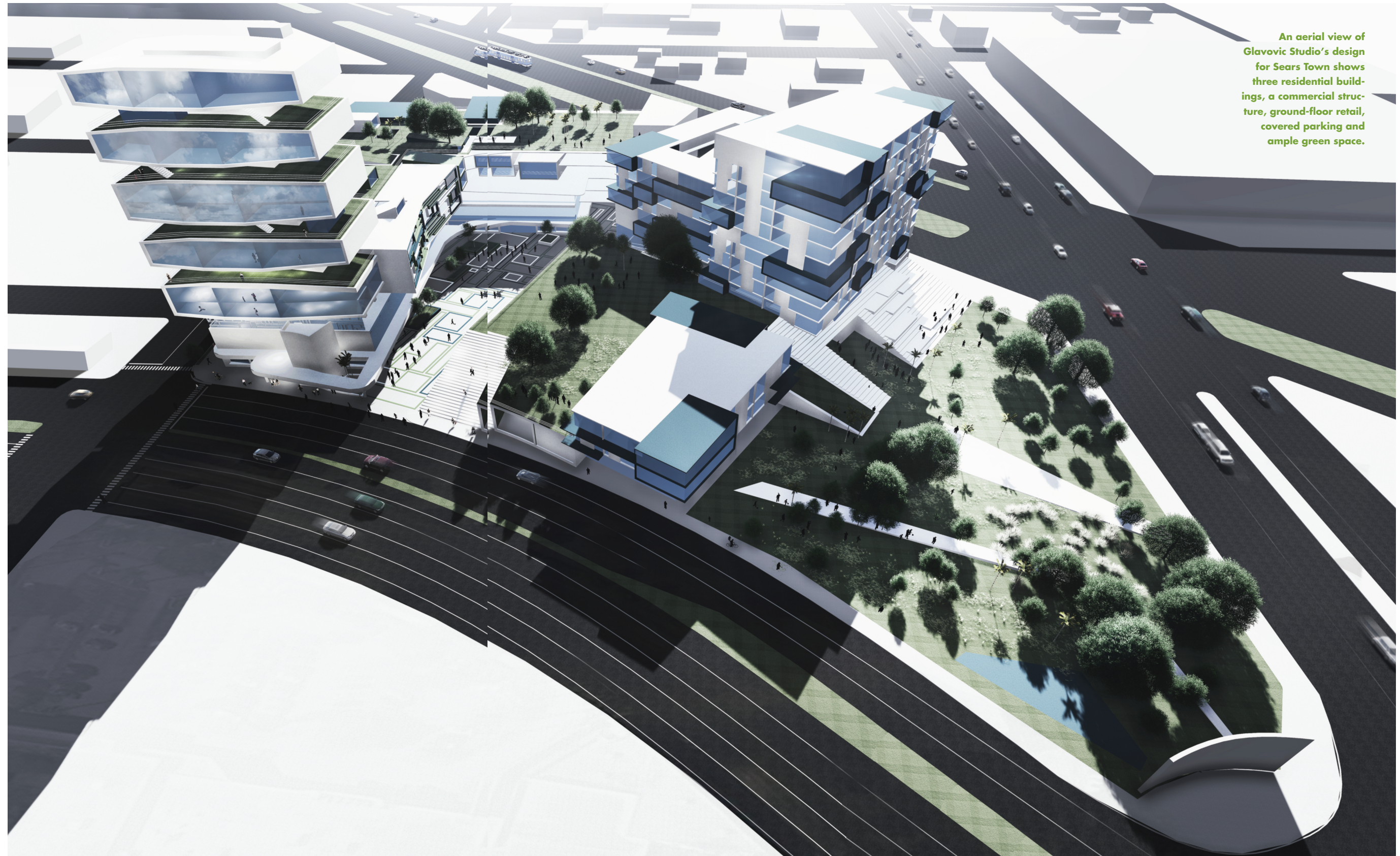
**Sears Town was designed for an audience in love with the automobile, and so it incorporated acres and acres of parking that were — at the time — seen as a symbol of modernity and consumerism. As Fort Lauderdale evolved, Sears Town did not...**

However, Sears Town was designed for an audience in love with the automobile, and so it incorporated acres and acres of parking that were — at the time — seen as a symbol of modernity and consumerism. As Fort Lauderdale evolved, Sears Town did not, and the low-rise structure and surrounding sea of asphalt slowly started to represent an outdated model of urban planning. By the time we held our *HOME Fort Lauderdale*-sponsored charrette ten years ago, it had become a drab, lifeless complex that no longer suited the needs of the 21st-century consumer. Today, with the nearby Flagler Village exploding into a thriving arts district, the need to revitalize this significant intersection is even greater than it was ten years ago.

So, we dug back into the old *HOME* archives to take a second look at what these visionaries had created for the Sears Town of the future. One design, from Margi Nothard, President of Glavovic Studio Inc., stood out for its sustainability, shared community spaces and integration of the surrounding cityscape. Remarkably enough, it is not only relevant today, but it lays out a truly visionary plan that makes absolute sense for the rapidly morphing gateway to downtown Fort Lauderdale, a gateway that begins on the land that Sears Town occupies. When we asked Nothard what she would change in her decade-old proposal, she responded with, “Absolutely nothing.” We agree. Here, we re-explore Glavovic Studio’s revolutionary vision for Sears Town and how it can help reconnect this central site to the rest of our community.

#### Sustainability

Why reimagine and not simply rebuild? When Sears Town was built in 1955,



An aerial view of Glavovic Studio’s design for Sears Town shows three residential buildings, a commercial structure, ground-floor retail, covered parking and ample green space.



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**South facade of the project pops with varied depths and shapes for housing. The bottom two floors are the original Sears complex from 1955.**

it was a sleek, low-slung dream — a crisp, clean work of architecture that can, and should, be restored and reinvented. Nothard's design retains the entire original structure, and uses its signature arc as the focal point. "It's all about adaptive re-use," Nothard says. "You can keep what exists and add to it rather than remove, which is something we don't do very often in South Florida."

Her new design also does away with the sea of parking, transforming it into a recreational and cultural district where people can live, shop, eat and play without the use of a car. "For me, the reference to the vehicle has more to do with technology and invention. Our world is better because of that technology, but there is an environmental consequence," she says. "So now we have the ability to reduce our carbon footprint." The project's location, just a few blocks from

downtown, reduces the need for so much parking. Additionally, by placing a high-density development near the railroad tracks, she also makes a case for turning the railway into a public transit line.

### Shared Community

"This project is about connecting all kinds of people in one place," Nothard says. "My point was to provide for various income levels in a single project." In order to attract this broad range of buyers, Nothard incorporated three very different residential buildings into her design. The most iconic tower, in the southeast corner, is the most luxurious. The original building accounts for the bottom two floors and is intended for retail space. The third floor shows a shared outdoor amenities deck for residents and the remaining floors are expansive residential units with floor-to-ceiling glass windows and rooftop gardens rather than traditional balconies. "There are open spaces between each floor on the tower



building,” Nothard says. “This way everyone has outdoor space.” Additionally, each level could be sold as six separate units or even as one unit, depending on the desires of the buyer.

Located just west of this tower is a second residential building comprised of smaller “box units.” The roof of this structure acts as elevated green space that connects all three residential buildings. “We’re trying to say that small can be

**“There are open spaces between each floor on the tower building,” Nothard says. “This way everyone has outdoor space.” Additionally, each level could be sold as six separate units or even as one unit, depending on the desires of the buyer.**

luxurious,” Nothard says of this building. “Here you have a small pied-a-terre with its own rooftop garden in the middle of downtown.” Below, the original building houses retail space that wraps into a courtyard that is intended for public use.

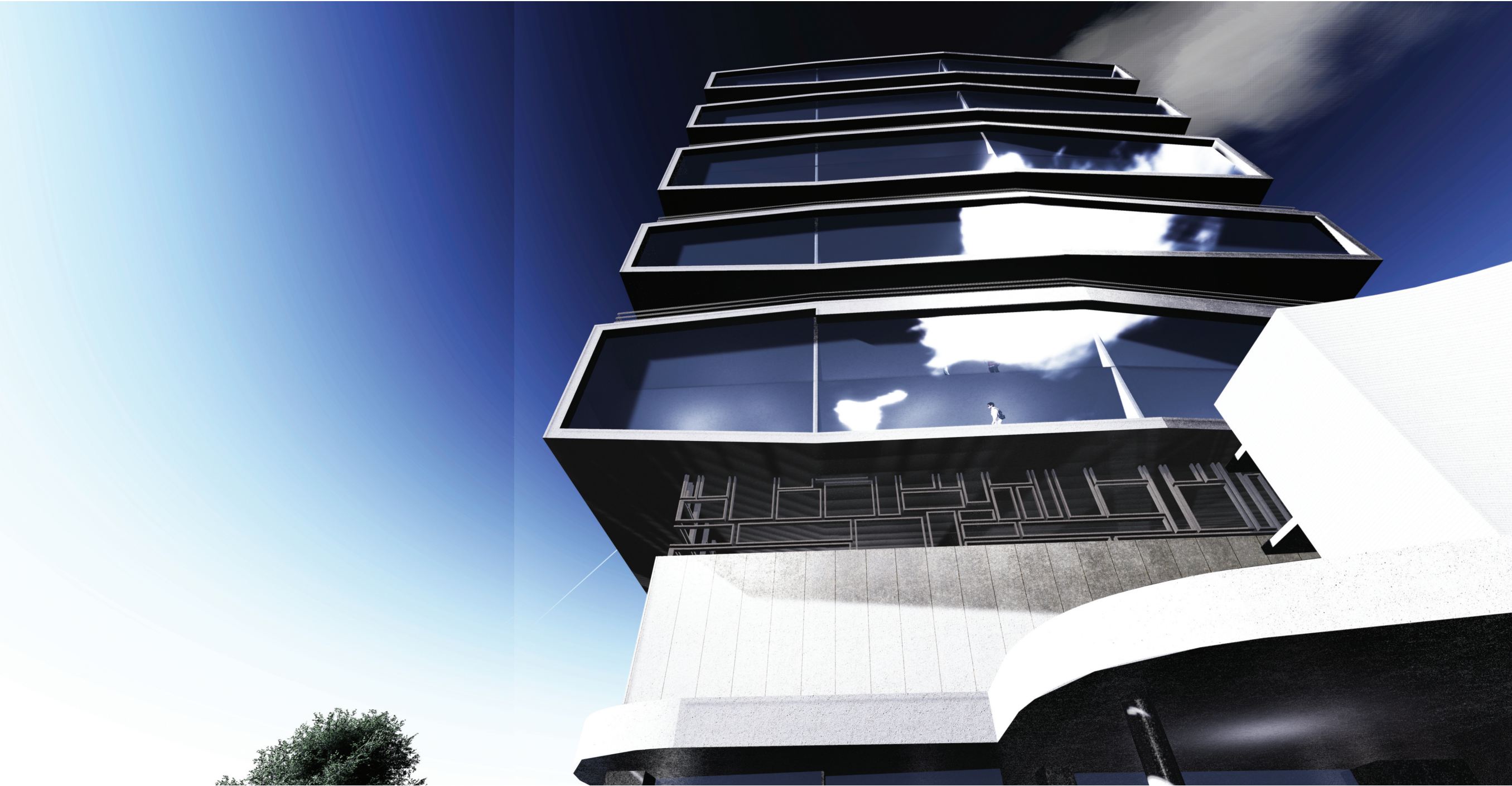
The third residential structure, in the northwest corner, is the most affordable option and sits atop a plinth with parking below. This building mirrors the more traditional residential offerings found throughout South Florida today. “It’s very different from other large sites that only address a single goal,” Nothard says. “This really engages an entire culture at a meaningful level.”

**Integration of Surrounding Cityscape**

One of the most appealing aspects of Nothard’s design is its incorporation of an urban design framework that reinforces connections to Holiday Park, the Parker Playhouse and Flagler Village. “The important thing is to not give up on the community that exists, but rather to add value and create more opportunities for that community,” Nothard says.

She accomplishes this by including abundant civic space, namely a sizeable park that spans the entire north side of the site. A large expanse of stairs connects the northernmost residential building to the park, and Nothard envisions these stairs as an ideal setting for a performance space on nights and weekends. A fourth modest-sized structure that hugs the Federal Highway corridor is intended for commercial use, perhaps as support space for an arts organization or a restaurant. On the south side of this building is more elevated public green space. Other aspects of her design that help connect the dots with the community are shaded walkways that frame the street and plenty of street-facing retail space.

So, what do you get when you combine residential, commercial, retail and public spaces all in one central setting? A diverse, pedestrian-friendly district that strengthens the downtown as the heart of the community and acts as a catalyst for continued redevelopment in the area. “This project could be successful for the



city, the neighborhood and the developers,” Nothard says. It could also be one of the most important mixed-use redevelopment sites to rise in Fort Lauderdale — a bigger, better version of the new urban center that Weed envisioned in 1955.

After a second look at Nothard’s design, it is evident that her studio’s proposal is an extremely well-crafted set of ideas that looks at the potential of

arts and culture to stimulate economic growth in Fort Lauderdale. We at *Tropic* feel Glavovic Studio’s efforts need careful examination by the owner of the property, RK Centers. The fact that this design looks as fresh and exciting today is a testament to the architect’s forward-thinking and conscious design. *Tropic* sincerely hopes RK Centers’ owner, Raanan Katz, feels the same way. Stay tuned ... ■

**The southeast tower is the most luxurious featuring duplex units, each with floor-to-ceiling windows and rooftop gardens above.**