

# Fitting into History

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Some challenges are too good to pass up, like designing 25 units of market-rate housing for two residential, church-owned lots in an affluent historic district. Add to the list a peace park and a few 100-year-old oak trees.

ASK Studio welcomed this ambitious task of 4000 Ingersoll as an opportunity to work a little closer to home. Project architect Kurtis Wolgast, AIA, acknowledged that “the location of this project is right up the street from our

office. The idea of getting to work on buildings in your own neighborhood is certainly intriguing. Designing the environment around us is definitely a challenge we were looking forward to.”

Overall, it took ASK Studio’s office about three years to get started on construction. “The project started in 2014; that included an extended design process that required collaboration with several entities who all were invested—the city council members, the adjacent church, neighborhood

groups, and even prospective tenants.” Construction started in 2017 and completed in 2019.

With so much to consider on this project, it’s no surprise that it took so much time to break ground. Plymouth Congregational Church is one of the oldest historic churches in the Des Moines area and has been in its current location on Ingersoll Avenue since the mid-1900s. The church owns much of the surrounding properties, including one house that had to be





painstakingly moved 2 miles to Sherman Hill, another historic district. There were also 100-year-old oak trees on the northeast corner of the property that had to be saved and maintained. ASK was able to complete these arduous tasks, leaving the plot rich in history and possibility.

There was a lot to contemplate regarding the structure that would become 4000 Ingersoll. Wolgast said that the community was vocal about wanting the new building to be “complementary and fit into the rest



**Opposite:** Hundred-year-old oak trees add to the peaceful feeling of the ambitious 4000 Ingersoll project. **Top right:** Kitchen interior. **Bottom right:** The community’s input “started to influence palettes and the idea behind art moderne and trying to emphasize the horizontal aspects of it,” Wolgast says.





of the neighborhood,” making sure it was “part of that fabric.” It would need to be rooted in historical references, but not mimic nearby structures. Wolgast confirms that “it was good to hear the perspectives of all parties involved and any concerns needed to be addressed if this was going to be a successful project, at all scales.” Despite the modern concrete towers only a few blocks away, this new building would merge the feeling of a traditional historic neighborhood with amenities of the modern era.

ASK reached into a deep toolkit of themes and style to address the neighborhood’s interests. The design team’s neighborhood evaluation found that the most recent successful interventions were modern, but discussions with the current neighborhood residents pointed to a style more “moderne” than modern.

Wolgast says that the community pointed to one building in particular that was “an art deco style building that had masonry

elements to it, so we definitely knew we wanted to have that influence [while] providing some mainstream elements.”

With a definitive line of inspiration in place, ASK could begin looking at the specifics of what 4000 Ingersoll would become. The community’s input “started to influence palettes and the idea behind art moderne and trying to emphasize the horizontal aspects of it,” Wolgast says. “I think it also helped bring down the scale of the building to help emphasize that we were fitting in with the neighborhood context.”

The late art deco phase occurred concurrently with art moderne. Both eras emphasized horizontal features, details the design team gladly embraced. Wolgast pointed out that you can see the application of this with the “window fenestration patterns and the lines that we drew across by framing out some of those windows with white brick.” ASK also made use of some custom-made detail for the balconies. Wolgast says that, on all the

6- to 8-feet-deep balconies, ASK applied “horizontal balustrades, versus what you typically see with vertical pickets, to help add to the language that we were creating here.” In addition to the horizontal siding, moderne tropes such as nautical references and extended roof edges grace the building.

Although art deco is a large influence on the design of the structure, Wolgast says that it was “more about forms and material and less about the over-decoratization of certain elements.” The many art deco gestures, such as window groupings with masonry frames and the use of shingles to create a machine-made, repetitive pattern form a cohesive design but, Wolgast continued, “it is very much pared down and not as over-stylized as the art deco form.” The building makes a statement enough with its own unique alchemy of style. 4000 Ingersoll now stands as a distillation of the neighborhood character, an ode to the moderne, and a sign of respect for the past, present and future.





**Opposite:** The new building merges the feeling of a historic neighborhood with amenities of the modern era. **Top left and right:** Wolgast says that, on all the 6- to 8-foot-deep balconies, ASK applied "horizontal balustrades, versus what you typically see with vertical pickets, to help add to the language that we were creating here." **Bottom:** In addition to the horizontal siding, moderne tropes such as nautical references and extended roof edges grace the building.

