

New England HOME

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New England living,
from the city to
the shore



Perspectives

Five Questions



Architect Gary Johnson of Cambridge Seven Associates says a surge in new high-rise residences is changing the fabric of Boston and other cities.

1 How have you seen this trend toward high-rise city living developing?

There is an increasing demand; more people want to live in urban high-rise settings because they realize it is a great way to live. There are the views and vantage points, but there is also the idea that a high-rise building does not take up a large footprint, so it can be environmentally friendly, efficient. We are seeing a lot more desire from people to live in these vertical settings. It is also a great solution for people

who are busy 24/7; they can be both close to their offices and connected with people and amenities all around them.

2 Who is driving this recent explosion of urban high-rise residential projects?

A lot of suburbanites are moving into the city, even more than we envisioned before we began work on our latest project, a sixty-one-story, high-rise residential and hotel building at One Dalton Street,

| INTERVIEW BY ROBERT KIENER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN SOARES |

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in Boston. Interestingly, unlike in other cities, we are not seeing a lot of foreign investment by offshore people coming in. The demand reflects a pent-up desire by people, from empty nesters to young professionals, who have the ability to live in the city and want a luxury high-rise that provides them with a lot of services and amenities. There are more and more people interested in having that downtown urban experience.

3 Is this trend changing the character of New England residential design?

That's a really interesting question! I say "interesting" because when we started this One Dalton project, we anticipated we would get local buyers, and we had lots of discussion on what they would be looking for. Would they want the same things they had in their traditional suburban homes, such as separate kitchens or separate dining rooms? It turns out that most people—of every

age—are looking for open living spaces, as opposed to a lot of separate little rooms. For example, they ask for the kitchen to be part of the living space. It proved to us that if you are living in a vertical building, you want to live in a much less cluttered and more open way. That is very different from traditional New England residential design.

4 What does the high-rise trend mean for the architectural character of the surrounding neighborhood?

A big building in a neighborhood does change the character a bit, without question. But if architects, developers, planners, and landscape architects can work with the community and produce a building that can improve the neighborhood and the urban fabric, you can end up with a positive result. For example, at One Dalton we are building a small park across the street that will serve the community. You have to enhance the neighborhood—make it better, more vital—not detract from it. Height can be a touchy factor, so we went way out of our way to address how our building, which is very tall, comes down and sits on the

ground and becomes a true citizen within its environment. The lower four floors are sheathed in Boston granite and scaled to the surrounding buildings. That was done very purposely because there was a lot of concern that our building didn't just "erupt" right out of the ground like some high rises do.

5 Is this high-rise living going to happen in other New England cities, like Providence or Portland?

Probably. But the buildings may not be as tall as what we are seeing in Boston. I absolutely believe that people are yearning to live in more urban environments. I know Providence is doing a lot of infill work with some of their old mills and office buildings, transforming them into downtown living. You may see more infill projects that will bring people into those areas. And the more people who live at its center, the more vital a city becomes. It is so simple: restaurants and shops flourish. Urban residential units help build a better fiber. You get a 24/7 vitality. | *Cambridge Seven Associates, Cambridge, Mass., 617-492-7000, cambridgeseven.com* 