

**KANSAS CITY JACKSON  
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**Housing demand Downtown seen by  
Architects**

**By Kate Miller**

Architect Robert L. Frye spent several years stripping woodwork, restoring marble stairways and rebuilding a Union Hill apartment building at 30<sup>th</sup> and McGee streets. The finished product pleased him so much that he moved not only his home into the building but his office as well.

Now he and his partner, Michael D. Jantsch, hope to offer these apartments – in a building once slated for demolition – for sale as condominiums. It's but one of the ways the two architects say they can return quality housing to Midtown.

From their first-floor Arkhitekton office, they watch their \$1.2 million Union Court Townhomes project rise across the street. They also plan a \$2 million renovation of the Roanoke Court apartments on Southwest Trafficway. In all, their current Midtown projects will add a total 65 residences to the area.

Considered against the magnitude of the Downtown construction boom, the projects may seem modest. But historically, Mr Frye said, an upsurge in housing accompanies downtown revitalizations.

"But the big companies can't do all the small projects," Mr. Frye said. "We're small and can make all the little decisions that come up ourselves."

Jim Young, president of Union Hill Redevelopment, originally planned to destroy the now-renovated apartment building and four similar buildings beside it. Mr Frye's restoration

of the Victorian building so impressed Mr. Young that he proposed an amendment to the Union Hill plan to transform three of the buildings into condominiums. The condominium-conversion proposal still awaits city approval.

Mr. Frye, 25, and Mr. Jantsch, 30 say they once spent too much time commuting to Downtown jobs from the suburbs. Like many persons their age, Midtown sounded the beckoning call. In improving the properties that first caught their attention, the two say their young ages are definite assets.

"We are the market group," Mr. Frye said. "When we make design decisions, it's a big advantage to have the same ideas as that group."

While acknowledging that youth and inexperience sometimes leads to failed businesses, the two architects say their security lies in controlling all phases of their projects.

"We're trying to do every piece – pick the land, lay the plans, design the units, hire the people," Mr. Jantsch said.

"We shovel the dirt at the construction sites," Mr. Frye said. "We'll even sell them."

Mike Gegen, an executive with Boatmen's First National Bank, bought an Arkhitekton townhouse before its wood frame was in place. Mr. Gegen said he didn't mind the lack of a completed model townhouse. The ability to design the layout of his unit overrode that concern, he said.

"The minor risk of their youth and lack of experience is more than offset by their design skills and willingness to give us what we wanted," he said.

While most neighborhood residents approved the condominium conversion plan at a recent Longfellow Community Association meeting, one resident voted against it, saying the units cost too much. The 850-square-foot, one-

bedroom units would sell for \$60,000 to \$72,000. Mr Frye said about five people already have shown interest in purchasing them, and a similar conversion plan may someday be proposed for the Roanoke Court project.

The architects stretched outside of Midtown for their other projects – the \$4 million Burr Oak Woods Apartments project in Blue Springs and a \$300,000 commercial strip in Raytown.

The townhouses should be completed this fall and interior work on the Roanoke Court project would begin this winter.

The architects said they plan to do other residential projects, but would not say where.

“There are opportunities all around here,” Mr. Jantsch said.