

Former Miller & Rhoads gets a bold look



EVA RUSSO/TIMES-DISPATCH

The new atrium design of the former Miller & Rhoads building (above) soars 85 feet from the second floor. Richmond Mayor L. Douglas Wilder (right) and project manager Ron Silverman toured the building yesterday to check on progress of a \$100 million renovation to convert the historic department store building in downtown Richmond into a Hilton Garden Inn and condominium complex. (Details, B2.)



Enthusiastic Wilder takes look at hotel-condo site

BY MICHAEL MARTZ
Times-Dispatch Staff Writer

The old Miller & Rhoads had the Tea Room and the Legendary Santa.

But it didn't have a seven-story open-air atrium with a swimming pool.

The department store is long gone, but its venerable home in downtown Richmond is more than halfway through a \$100 million transformation that includes a soaring rectangular atrium in the heart of one of the city's landmark buildings. The atrium rises 85 feet from the building's second floor, where the pool, fitness center and community room will be, and extends 160 feet in length and 40 feet in width.

"This is a helluva atrium! I've never seen anything like it in my life!" exclaimed Mayor L. Douglas Wilder as he toured the former Miller & Rhoads building yesterday.

Wilder got the first public glimpse of what will become a Hilton Garden Inn and condominium complex in the block bounded by East Broad, East Grace, North Fifth and North Sixth streets in what once was the city's premier retail district.

The mayor was accompanied by executives from HRI Properties, the New Orleans-based development company that

he brought into the foundering project two years ago, and the Richmond-based architects who are overseeing the building's daring redesign.

"No one can envision how beautiful this atrium is going to be," said Robert S. Mills, president of Commonwealth Architects and chairman of the Richmond Planning Commission.

The project's cost has gone from \$80 million to \$100 million, and its timetable for completion has slipped from summer to late fall of next year, but Wilder had nothing but praise yesterday for what HRI has accomplished.

"I wish it had been earlier," he said, "but I can see the way they're doing it. It's solid, and it's going to be real."

Getting this far hasn't been easy for HRI and its contractor, Whiting-Turner of Baltimore. They're working with layers of history in a building that dates to 1885, when Miller & Rhoads opened, through several additions that culminated with the department store's ill-fated blending with 6th Street Marketplace a century later.

"It's been a grueling renovation," said Pres Kabacoff, HRI's chief executive officer and chairman of the board.

Kabacoff joined with Wilder in launching the project 19 months ago. They hope to finish it by November. They think they'll have something spe-

cial in the end.

The Hilton Garden Inn will have 250 rooms, with a main entrance on Broad Street and a porte-cochère for dropping off and picking up hotel guests in the quadrangle facing Broad and Fifth streets. (In Miller & Rhoads lore, it's near where the department store sold chicken pot pies and pastries from its first-floor bakery.)

"Look at all the marble," Wilder said, pointing to the original floor of what will become the hotel lobby.

The hotel will feature a full-service restaurant as part of about 21,000 square feet of retail and commercial space. Hotel guests will share its amenities with residents of the building's 133 condominiums. The condos will range in price from \$129,000 to \$400,000.

Wilder rode the construction elevator to the seventh floor — it would have been Santa Land at this time of year at Miller & Rhoads — to tour the footprints of loft condos and hotel rooms. One floor up, he walked through what will become condos with terraces that have sweeping views of the city.

Sidney Barthelemy, communications and government affairs director for HRI, smiled and said, "This is going to be a fabulous building."

• Contact Michael Martz at (804) 649-6964 or mmartz@timesdispatch.com.

Commonwealth
ARCHITECTS

Reprinted by Commonwealth Architects, PC for the purposes of information sharing and marketing only. Please call with any questions. (804) 648-5040