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## Aqua makes waves as world's best

### REAL ESTATE | Stunner named 2009 Skyscraper of the Year

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The lady trumped The Donald. Jeanne Gang, founder of Studio Gang Architects, designed a residential building called the Aqua at 225 N. Columbus. Aqua was named Tuesday as the 2009 Skyscraper of the Year, an annual award issued by Emporis, a company that sells data about tall buildings. With it comes a Top 10 list of the new buildings Emporis judges best in a calendar year.

For 2009, Aqua was ranked first in balloting by the award's jury, Emporis' senior editors. Chicago's Trump International Hotel & Tower finished fifth.

Aqua has garnered Gang reams of praise since it began taking shape in the Lakeshore East development north of Grant Park. It also was a breakthrough assignment for Gang and her firm. She opened it in 1997 and started with a focus on interiors and small-scale projects. Gang executed them with flair and attention to the environment that brought her to the attention of James Loewenberg, co-chief executive of Magellan Development Group LLC, developer of Lakeshore East.

She has completed work in Chicago for organizations such as the Chinese American Service League, Illinois Institute of Technology and SOS Children's Villages. Her Media Production Center for Columbia College Chicago opened last month at 1600 S. State. Gang, 45, said Aqua was her first high-rise, either at her own shop or dating from her time at Booth Hansen Associates in Chicago and the firm of Rem Koolhaas.

Emporis editors praised Aqua for using standard materials of concrete and glass to bring curves to a relentlessly rectilinear place. The 82-story building's balconies create a wave effect, with each one varying slightly in size from the one below. The nautical theme gives it a different look depending on the angle of the view.

The editors also liked eco-friendly touches, such as design tricks that minimize the chances of birds flying into the glass. The concrete is coated to reduce heat-island temperatures, and the balconies act as shades for units that receive the most sun during the summer.

Loewenberg, himself an architect, endured stinging criticism for his own work. But he knows how to deliver a sellable product, and he wanted an architect to provide a statement building. "We came up with ideas that were within the budget. He was supportive all the way," Gang said.

She said Aqua grew from the same approach she uses for projects closer to the ground. Gang said she worried first about function, then about how the design can best fit a location. She doesn't like architects who force a viewpoint or trademark onto a tract. "Architects should start with an idea, not an icon," Gang said.

Second place in the Emporis standings was a 23-story office tower in Dubai called O14. The work of Reiser + Umemoto Architecture, it uses a concrete sheath punctured with holes to protect the building from the Arabian sun. The third place building was the Met in Bangkok, a 69-story residential tower designed by WOHA Architects that also incorporates energy efficiency.

Trump's Chicago product, officially listed at 98 stories, is the work of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP and its former design chief, Adrian Smith, now at his own firm.

Does Gang, still relatively new on the scene and in an overwhelmingly

male field, take satisfaction in topping rivals with international renown? She declined the invitation to gloat.

"I just think it's great for Chicago to have two buildings in a ranking like this. Think of all the great buildings done last year all over the world. It shows we're still relevant," she said.

**WALK ON BY:** Last July, I wrote about the issue of condo contract "walkaways," people who never close on a condo sale because the unit's value has fallen, and they lose less money by giving up their deposit. Since then, the walkaway situation, also known as "contract fallout," apparently has gotten worse.

Developers of new buildings had fallout rates of 25 percent to 40 percent last year. At the release of her company's annual report on downtown condos, Appraisal Research Counselors Vice President Gail Lissner said the lucky developers have just 25 percent. Others are in the 50 percent range, she said. She said one building, which she wouldn't name, may be well above 50 percent, but simply refuses to cancel sales agreements, hoping the buyer will eventually show up for a closing. Contract fallout is hard to pin down because some developers do their best to conceal it.

**DOING THE DEALS:** Podolsky Northstar Corfac International was named receiver for two industrial buildings that Wrightwood Capital turned back to its lender, Jefferson-Pilot Investments Inc. Podolsky also manages and leases the buildings at 8451 W. 183rd St. and 8400 W. 185th St., Tinley Park. . . . Interline Brands Inc., represented by Cushman & Wakefield Inc., leased 120,000 square feet at 1100 Lombard Rd., Lombard, in a move from smaller space in Carol Stream.

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