

Columbia Parc at the Bayou District, at a glance

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By **Doug MacCash, The Times-Picayune**

Columbia Parc at the Bayou District is an apartment complex with 683 mixed-income units on the footprint of the mid-20th century St. Bernard development in Gentilly, which had 1,436 units. The name, Columbia Parc, combines a reference to nearby City Park and the brand of Columbia Residential, an Atlanta-based company that has produced 40 affordable housing developments across the South.



Enlarge **Cathy Hughes, The Times-Picayune** Columbia Parc at the Bayou District is an apartment complex with 683 mixed-income units on the footprint of the mid-20th century St. Bernard development in Gentilly, which had 1,436 units. **Columbia Parc** gallery (6 photos)

Developers: The Bayou District Foundation and Columbia Residential in partnership with HANO.

Designer: JHP Architecture and Urban Design of Dallas.

Architect of record: Broadmoor Design Group of New Orleans.

Budget: \$138 million for phase one

State of completion: All 466 first-phase apartments are finished. Subsequent phases totaling 317 apartments are expected to be complete by late 2012, with further amenities such as retail stores to follow.

Apartment size: From 711-square-foot one-bedroom apartments to 1,322-square-foot three-bedroom models, plus a few 1,534-square-foot, four-bedroom apartments.

Amenities listed on the Columbia Parc website: Front porches and balconies, controlled-access parking and street-side parking, alarm systems, full-size washers and dryers, hardwood-style flooring, ceramic tile, carpet, granite counters, kitchen islands (in some apartments), 9-foot ceilings, walk-in closets, ceiling fans, central heating and cooling, and lush landscaping. Shared features include an entertainment complex with an Internet café, 46-seat movie theater, fitness center, playground, splash park, and on-site courtesy officers.

Rent: From \$775 to \$1,300

The architectural intention: "We tried to come to New Orleans with humility and respect, and with eyes and ears open," said Jim Grauley, chief operating officer of Columbia Residential.



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Grauley said company representatives conducted a series of meetings with former St. Bernard residents to ask: "What are the things about the master design that matter to you?" The confidence of former residents in the sturdiness of the old brick buildings inspired the use of brick facades.

Designers also consulted the "Louisiana Speaks Pattern Book," a tradition-sensitive guide produced by the Louisiana Recovery Authority. And for good measure, Grauley hired the Crescent City's best-known painting consultant, Louis "Mr. Color" Aubert, to select the palette for the new neighborhood.

But, Grauley is quick to point out, all of these historically informed flourishes are not meant to be imitative. "We're not building the old New Orleans," he said, "just something evocative of that construction. What we didn't want to do is a weak replica; we wanted to draw on those elements to build a new place there."

A resident's view: Tanya Williams, who lived in the St. Bernard development for 35 years before the 2005 flood, said Columbia Parc "is lovely." Her favorite part of her yellow-beige townhouse apartment is "the way it's set up."

"You have your own front porch back porch that you don't share with anybody," Williams said. "And I feel safe. ... I have an upstairs porch. I go out there."

Other opinions: Tulane architecture professor Judith Kinnard said potential residents would probably choose the varied Columbia Parc streetscape over the sameness of the former St. Bernard architecture.

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"Most people prefer more individuality," she said. "Most people want something that looks like a single-family home with their own front porch and their own small patch of ground where they can do whatever they want to."

Yet, she said, she regrets the demolition of the old brick buildings that, judging by the remaining examples in Columbia Parc, had a certain simple beauty and elegance. "It's sort of heartbreaking," she said. "To throw them in a landfill doesn't seem right to me."