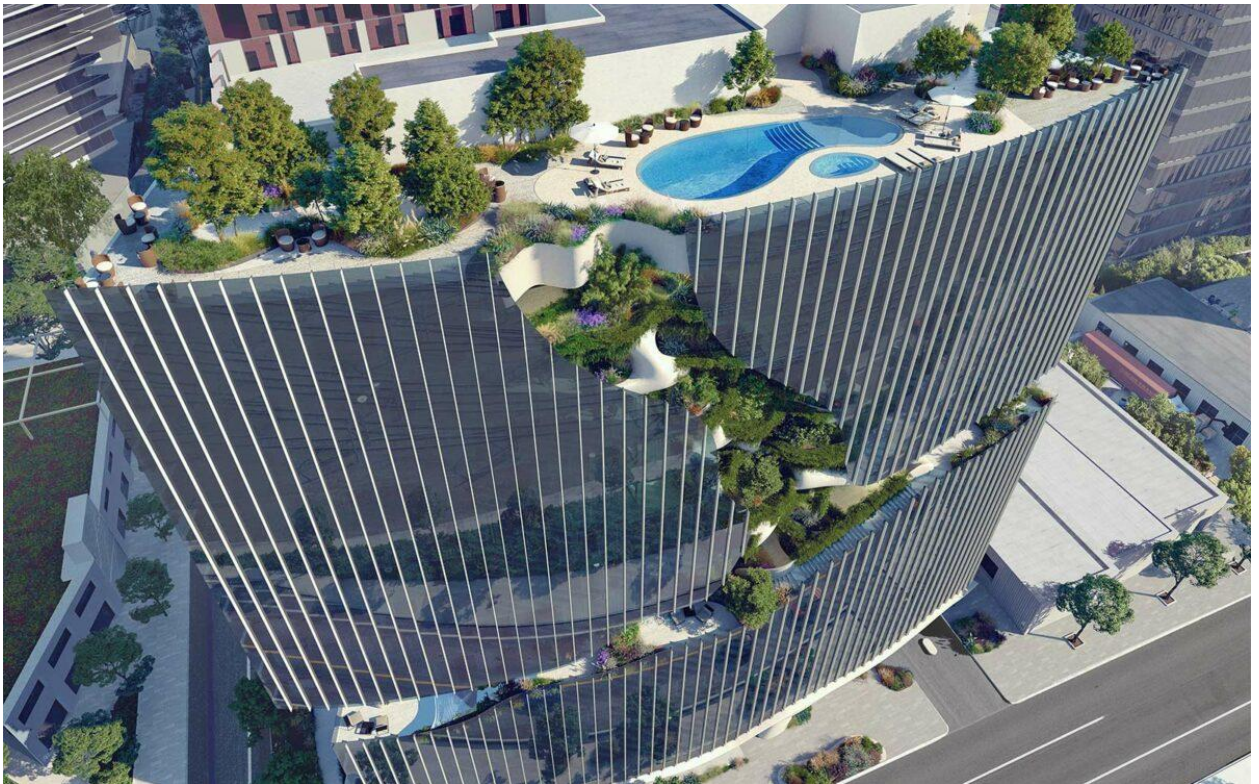


Denver's One River North is Leading the Way for Biophilic Design



By [Nadja Sayej](#) • Published On: March 11, 2022 • 5 min read



While many sustainable buildings are on the rise, one building in Denver takes its eco-consciousness to the next level.

[Biophilic design](#), as we know it, is nature-infused design. Imagine a long, wooden hallway of an office lobby lined with trees, hotel rooms with moss-covered walls or “green rooftops,” vegetation covering a flat roof. Basically, the best of biophilic design brings nature into buildings without it feeling like an untamed jungle or plant shop. With more commercial buildings ramping up their sustainable efforts, it makes sense that biophilic design will only grow in the coming years.



Image provided by One River North

It's called One River North, and it's not your average biophilic designed building. Designed by Beijing-based team [MAD Architects](#), this 16-storey building features 187 residential units and over 13,000 square feet of open-air environments. The renderings show the building draped with a ton of green plants, a glowing creek and a long walkway.

This landscaped walkway winds up across several floors to a green rooftop terrace with a garden, spa and pool. On the ground floor, the building will have roughly 8,000 square feet of retail space.

Located in the RiNo neighborhood of Denver, the project is located at 3930 Blake Street. The construction began in the fall of 2021 and is expected to be completed before the end of 2023. It's a beacon of biophilic design and is a trailblazer in how it introduces a pathway into the building's design.



Image provided by One River North

The project's developers are [The Max Collaborative](#), [Uplands Real Estate Partners](#) and [Wynne Yasmer Real Estate](#). MAD Architects is partnering with Denver-based [Davis Partnership Architects](#), and general contractors of the project are [Saunders Construction](#).

It's not a traditional hike up, it's more like a crack in the façade that shapes the walkway up across 10 stories, all of which have organic shapes. These curvaceous shapes are inspired by Colorado's nearby Rocky Mountain peaks. This side structure along the building also takes visual cues from the nearby trails and nature.

Bringing nature into the urban landscape was key for this biophilic design. It's what Kevin Ratner, co-founder of The Max Collaborative, called "blending nature and architecture to inspire a well-balanced life," in his [interview with *Global Construction Review*](#).



Image provided by One River North

“One River North is the model for how we should be living, surrounding ourselves in the natural environment, bringing nature into our homes and creating authentic, biophilic experiences coupled with modern comforts and conveniences,” Ratner said in a statement.

“The nature-inspired design by MAD Architects was influenced by Colorado’s legendary landforms and merges nature and architecture to inspire a well-balanced life,” he said. “It’s glass facade is likewise ribbed with louvers that regulate sunlight and soften its visual presence, shaping a serene retreat in the sky.”

Biophilic design is not limited to just multifamily buildings, but office towers and hotels, too. Some of the best examples of biophilic design include those that use natural materials to give an experience that offers a connection to nature.



Image provided by One River North

One example is [1 Hotels](#), which has locations in New York and Miami. The company has filled its properties with plants and reclaimed wood, sustainably-sourced bedding and moss walls, and plant-based walls in [several of their hotel rooms](#).

Another trailblazing property is [Second Home in Lisbon](#), an apartment tower with over 1,000 plants throughout its premises, while [the Wardian](#) in London is an apartment tower with its own private garden and greenery on each resident's outdoor patio.

Offices have gone biophilic, too. Amazon built its futuristic headquarters in Seattle with enormous glass globes called biospheres, which are filled with trees and vines. These spheres are miniature, encased forests that some call utopian, as the property covers over three million square feet across three city blocks. Meanwhile, Apple Park, Apple's headquarters — this round building, surrounded by trees — plants over 3,000 native California tree species, along with two miles of running tracks and outdoor space for staff.



Image provided by One River North

According to [author](#) Amanda Sturgeon, who is an architect with [Mott MacDonald](#), we're seeing a biophilic renaissance, as it's "where people and nature can thrive together."

"For meaningful change to happen at the pace necessary, the built environment sector will have to transform holistically," Sturgeon wrote in [a recent op-ed](#).

"We will have to shift our fundamental relationship with nature to make whole systems change. Only then can we restore a positive and thriving relationship with the world. Only then can we solve the climate crisis."

But how does biophilic design help with climate change? According to Alexander Verbeek, the policy director of the [Environmental Development Resource Center in Brussels](#), biophilic design should not be just for wealthy homes, but in all homes.

Biophilic design, he claimed, should include a synergy with nature, allowing us all to be [closer to nature in our everyday lives](#), so we are prepared to deal with the demands of changing climate (more heatwaves and heavier downpours). So, to Verbeek, biophilic design should be a solution to help deal with the climate crisis.

To architect Ma Yansong, who led the One River North project as the principal partner and founder of MAD Architects, the goal is to restore a spiritual quality that is lacking in today's big cities. Each curve isn't designed on a computer (he calls that "[computer geometry](#)") but is all sketched by hand. It's primarily inspired by Chinese gardens.

"If we regard modern cities as man-made landscapes on the earth, we need to design canyons, woods, creeks, and waterfalls, transforming concrete forests into second nature," Yansong said.

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