

IN BUSINESS Las Vegas

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# Structures



A special supplement to In Business Las Vegas

# Miami-based engineers move to serve high-rise market in Vegas

By Deborah Roush/ Contributing Writer

Mark Baker, president of Miami-based IBA Consultants, compares what his firm can do for a high-rise project to that of a "skin doctor."

"We specialize in the outside of the building from the bottom of the feet to the top of the head," Baker said, explaining what IBA provides owners, developers, architects and construction managers in the high-rise construction industry.

IBA's engineers are the exterior wall, roofing and waterproofing specialists who make "double-sure" a project is done correctly — that the building is properly protected from the wind and the windows won't leak, Baker said.

On March 1, IBA will open an office in Las Vegas to serve the fast-growing high-rise condominium market.

"If a developer wants to build a 50-story building he'll hire an architect to specifically look at the function and the layout, and design the overall look of it and how people will move around.

"But there are so many components of the project, and the exterior is one of the most important. We may be hired — either by the developer or architect — to work on materials, systems and components and the interaction of them — like how a window will fit in the wall or how the wall attaches to the roof," he said.

Baker, who started IBA about 15 years ago, said his specialized engineering consultants could help from the design stage through the final building inspection.

The first step, he said, involves reviewing the building design. "We want our clients to get what they pay for, but not more than they need," he said.

Next, Baker's engineers take models of the building and test it to "make sure it's going to do what it is supposed to do. That it won't break in a 110-mile wind, for example," he said.

That is done scientifically — in a laboratory where the engineers can simulate the effects of wind and water.

Baker's firm also does "good, old-fashioned quality control," testing the buildings exterior in every step of construction. "We want to make sure that the right sealants are used, that materials are not being substituted or something is left out. We'll test randomly and report back to the owner or architect," he said.

And with portable testing equipment and a mobile laboratory, IBA can also administer on-the-job tests. "Once they start putting in the windows for example, we'll test one. If it fails, we'll find out why, repair it and then retest. Then we'll go up 10 floors and do it again," he explained.

"It's a quality and liability issue and a comfort level for developers. It is better if a problem can be fixed up front before the condo association has to come in and you have to tear down and start over again," Baker said.

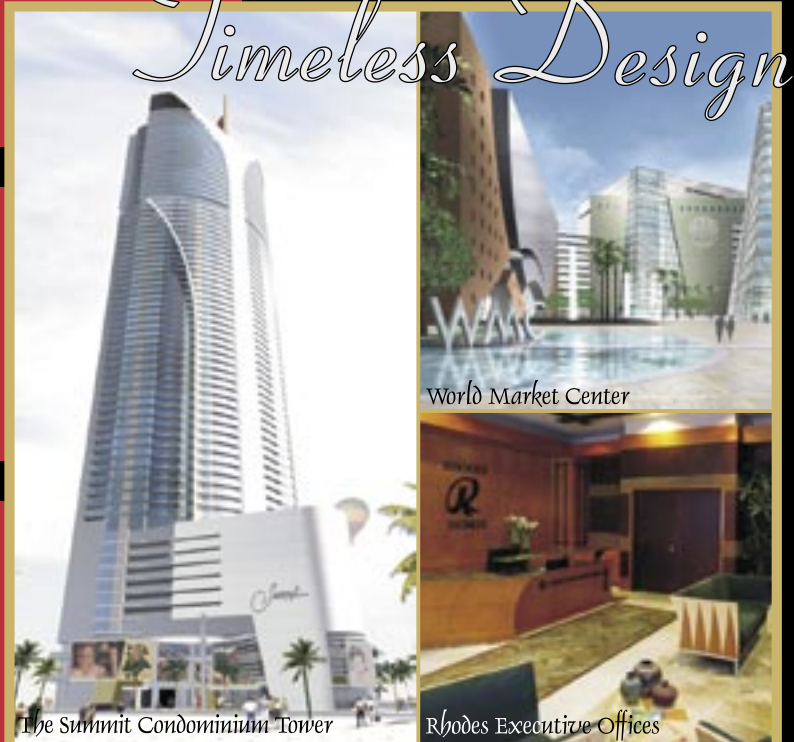
Baker said there are only a handful of companies like IBA that are recognized

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Mark Baker, right, is the owner of IBA Consultants. He will open a Las Vegas office next month.

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Turnberry Place, one of Las Vegas' first high-rise projects, is a longtime customer of IBA Consultants.

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nationally. When the Las Vegas office opens next week it will be the company's fourth — they already maintain three offices in Florida.

"In relationship to the (condo market), Las Vegas is absolutely the next Miami. There are 100 high-rise towers in different planning stages — that's exactly like Miami was 10 years go," he said.

In fact, Baker said he is working with many developers in Las Vegas who were clients in Miami. "This is the perfect market for us. There are seasoned developers who are coming from our town who we already know and guys who don't know what they are doing yet who can benefit from our expertise, he said.

Baker said the architectural community in Las Vegas has been receptive to the news that his firm, which has consulted in projects from The Venetian's Palazzo to a couple of MGM towers, will now have local presence.

Architects have come a long way when it comes to recognizing the importance of specialists like IBA, Baker said.

"It has been interesting how views toward (using our services) have changed. At first, many years ago, architects rejected us, thinking they didn't need our advice. Over time we have won them over, and now they probably represent 30 to 40 percent of our business.

"They recognize that the skin of a building is a sophisticated component and if it fails it is pricey," he added.

"The costs of mistakes are so expensive, especially in high-rise condos, with delays in construction and inability to close. If you have to tear something out and do it again it can cost 10 times what it would have if it had been done right the first time. Then there are lawsuits and settlements," Baker said.

Baker said the biggest goofs his firm sees are in workmanship. "The architects know how to write the specifi-

cations, and they don't usually specify the wrong product — that's not the problem. But the contractors do make mistakes, and our job is to catch them," he said.

Most errors, Baker said, lead to water damage of some kind. "We see a lot of water leakage; that's probably half of what we find. Then there's glass distortion, glass breaking, air leakage and structural failures where the walls wouldn't be able to stand a high wind load. Or, there's improper materials or strength of materials, like glass thickness," he added.

Baker said his firm could save money in the building of high-rise projects. "The proof of that is that 90 percent of our clients call us back again after they hire us the first time," he said.

In fact, that's why IBA is opening in Las Vegas next week. "One of our long-time customers is Turnberry Associates, which is based in Miami. We did a number of their projects there, and also flew back and forth to work on all of their projects since their first Turnberry tower in Las Vegas," he said.

"With what Turnberry is doing here, plus the word-of-mouth business that it has generated, it made sense to be here," he added. "We've done work in Mexico, Asia and Europe, but we like to be like to represent ourselves as local consultants and be as close as possible to the people we service.

It's a business plan that's paying off — even before IBA opens its doors.

"We've got 12 proposals out in Las Vegas right now. We leased space in the Marnell Corporate Center and they hired us to be consultants on their next building," he said.

"That's how it is. On every project we meet three people — the owner, the architect and the general contractor, and we might hear from all three of them on their next projects," he said.