



## SOUND OFF



John Sughrue, CEO, Brook Partners; Co-founder, Dallas Art Fair;  
Co-developer, Museum Tower, Dallas.

# DownTown

*(everything's waiting for you)*

This is a story about art and its impact on city building and a community.



Downtown today.



Downtown tomorrow.

Let's get started by saying that somehow I found my way from New York to Dallas in 1990 during a true depression in the Texas economy. Our investment firm purchased a significant amount of commercial real estate, and I found myself with a corner office on the fiftieth floor of Fountain Place, I. M. Pei's postmodern masterpiece, located in Downtown Dallas. And then a funny thing happened. I was told over and over again that Downtown Dallas was dead, was to be the next Detroit, and I had best sell all our investments in Downtown and move our operations to North Dallas, which represented to many the center of the universe for all things affluent in Dallas. I remember being in breakfast conferences where I was the only participant who argued the benefits of being in Downtown Dallas.

What did I see in Downtown Dallas in 1990 that others didn't? What I experienced was a collection of world-class assets such as the Meyerson Symphony Center, the Adolphus Hotel, Phillip Johnson's Crescent Court, and Richard Keating's JP Morgan Tower that all contributed to a remarkable postmodern skyline. I also dined on five-star cuisine at Stephan Pyles's Baby Ruth restaurant, Elisio and Francesco Farris's Arcodoro and Pomodoro, and Dean Fearing's Mansion restaurant. For shopping, Neiman Marcus, the holy grail of fashion, was a heartbeat away. I also discovered a community of remarkable Dallasites, both interesting and interested people. Sure, there was crime and vacant office buildings and littered parking lots, but the alternative to Downtown seemed to be antiseptic suburban offices, soulless strip centers, and bad chain restaurants. No, I decided I would stay in Downtown Dallas.

And then it happened. In 2003, the Nasher Sculpture Center, the finest private collection of contemporary sculpture in the world, opened in the heart of the Dallas Arts District. Designed by architect Renzo Piano and landscape designer Peter Walker, "the Nasher" introduced to Dallas a new standard of excellence in architectural design, landscaping, and the exhibition of art. It created a sacred center for our city where the best of man's artistic efforts could inspire and be appreciated. The Nasher was a catalyst for the acceleration of the multi-billion-dollar Victory project and the \$350 million Dallas Center for the Performing Arts (DCPA). The DCPA, consisting of the Winspear Opera House designed by Sir Norman Foster and the Dee and Charles Wyly Theatre designed by Rem Koolhaas, brings to near completion the Dallas Arts District, which now boasts the presence of four Pritzker Prize-winning architectural masterpieces. During this same time, the Hoffmans, Rachotskys, and Roses donated a priceless collection of contemporary art to the Dallas Museum of Art, and overnight the Museum became one of the great repositories of contemporary art in the world.

Today, the transformation of Downtown Dallas can be described as an embarrassment of riches. The first of two Santiago Calatrava bridges spanning the Trinity River is under construction. The Perot Museum of Nature & Science, designed by Thom Mann, another Pritzker Prize-winning architect, will start construction later this year. The Woodall Rodgers Park will start construction this March, fusing Uptown with Downtown, and all my favorite chefs, Stephan Pyles, the Farris brothers, and Dean Fearing, have opened or are soon to open world-class restaurants within walking distance of the Arts District. There is so much going on Downtown that I can't possibly mention all the truly worthy projects.

To participate in this transformation of Downtown into an international cultural destination is a privilege and continues to thrill me. My development partner, Lyle Burgin, and I have been fortunate to operate in both a world of commerce and culture. Our Magnolia Theatre anchors not only Magnolia Films, a film distribution company, but also Dallas's West Village. Our redevelopment of George Dah's modernist masterpiece at 1807 Ross is anchored by Stephan Pyles's eponymous restaurant and the Fashion Industry Gallery (f.i.g.). Stephan Pyles brought foodies back to Downtown Dallas, and f.i.g. reinforced that Downtown is first and foremost a fashion center. Museum Tower, a 42-story architecturally significant residential condominium designed by Scott Johnson, will be another great addition to the Arts District, rising between the Meyerson and the Nasher and fronting the Woodall Rodgers Park. In partnership with prominent private art dealer Chris Byrne, our Dallas Arts Fair will bring more than thirty blue-chip galleries from across the nation to f.i.g. the weekend of February 6-8, with a preview gala on February 5 benefiting Booker T. Washington School for the Performing and Visual Arts. The Dallas arts community is not just alive and well, it is leading Dallas in this new millennium and redefining our city. The arts are attracting the best and brightest of the creative class to Dallas and are a bigger and bigger economic engine for our city. The arts and the Arts District have centered Dallas, providing a true sense of place not just for our international visitors but also for all Dallasites. And we are just getting started. Move to North Dallas? I don't think so.

**Raised in Boston, Mr. Sughrue received his BA in Economics in 1982 from Harvard College and an MBA from The Amos Tuck School of Dartmouth College in 1988. He established Brook Partners, Inc., in 1994 to capitalize on real estate investment opportunities in the Southwest. Since that time, Brook Partners has evolved into a full-service real estate development and investment firm recognized as a leader in the ongoing redevelopment of Downtown Dallas.**