

URBAN LIVEABILITY

TUPELO ALLEY,
PORTLAND, USA



OVERVIEW

A mixed-use development that successfully responds to the surrounding historic neighbourhood, while achieving high densities close to public transport. Three separate buildings are set around a public-accessible series of laneways.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The North Mississippi Avenue district of Portland was established in the 19th century, and is now valued for its historic architecture and trendy cafes and shops. The Tupelo Alley Mixed-Use Development is a three-building complex that recalls the warehouse, commercial and semi-industrial past. The design integrates ground-floor retail and 188 apartments (studio, one- and two-bedroom) with public spaces and courtyards. This design scheme activates the street and connects existing alley ways with new neighborhood pedestrian connections, providing a contemporary model for high density “smart growth” and transit oriented development in North Portland.

The architecture is scaled to fit appropriately into the context of the surrounding residential neighborhood. The main building is six storeys high at the corner of Mississippi and Failing Avenues, but steps down to five storey further down along Mississippi Avenue. Facing Albina Avenue on the east side are two three storey blocks respectful of the single-family residential character.

Public permeability across the development is maximised by reestablishing the north south alley (partly running under the building to N Failing Street), and a new laneway running from Mississippi Avenue through to N Albina Avenue to the east. Connections to downtown Portland (and the light rail system) is a 10 minute walk from the development.

An underground car park is accessed via the side street, and parking spaces are purchased or leased by residents as an add-on to their apartments. Extensive bicycle parking has also been incorporated into the underground car park.

LEED Gold Certification was awarded to this project, illustrating the high levels of environmental design features integrated into the complex.



View of the six storey (left) and five storey (right) block fronting N Mississippi Avenue.

KEY PROJECT INFORMATION

HOUSING TYPE MIXED-USE	DENSITY 192 DW/HA	ARCHITECT & DESIGN TEAM SERA ARCHITECTS	YEAR COMPLETED 2008
SITE AREA 5612 M²	PROJECT TYPE 5 STOREY L-SHAPED RESIDENTIAL ABOVE GROUND FLOOR RETAIL; PAIR OF THREE STOREY BUILDINGS ALONG BACK LANE 188 Apartments and 1000m ² ground floor retail/commercial space. Studio and 1 bedroom apartments. PARKING BASEMENT – ACCESS FROM SIDE STREET	CLIENT/DEVELOPER MILL CREEK RESIDENTIAL TRUST (FORMERLY TRAMMELL CROW RESIDENTIAL) SUSTAINABILITY LEED GOLD CERTIFIED	PRICE BAND HIGH RANGE

UNDERSTANDING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

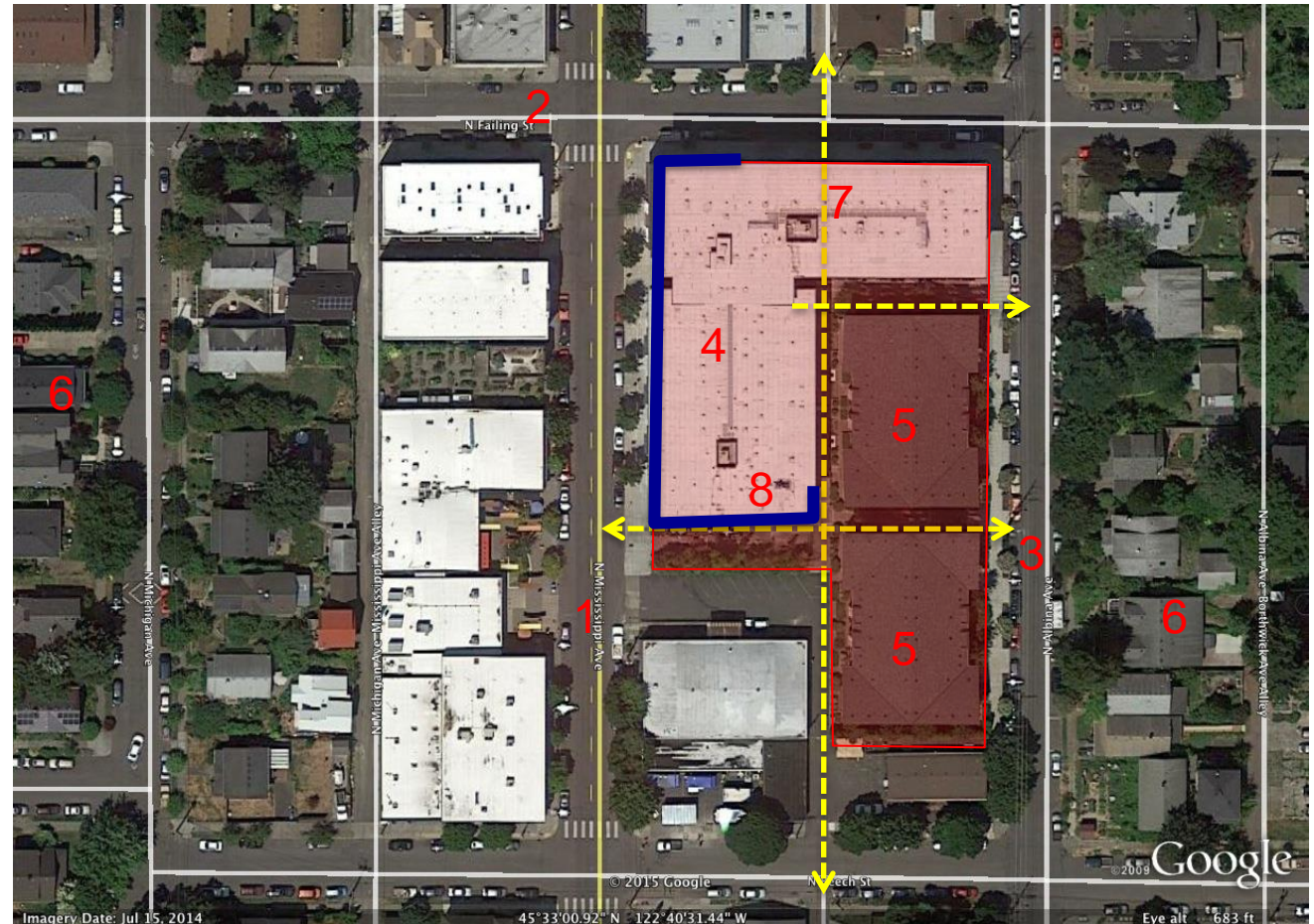
1. The North Mississippi Avenue district was previously a working class neighbourhood established in the 19th century, north of downtown Portland, across the Willamette River. The construction of the nearby Interstate freeway and the associated urban renewal led to its decline in the 1950-60's. The lower cost of housing and cheaper rental for business made the area attractive to younger people promoting trendy lifestyles.
2. This has led to the area being one of the more desirable residential areas in Portland, served by a variety of shops, café, restaurants and small businesses. What is now called the Historic Mississippi Avenue Shopping and Restaurant District has a culture all its own, combining originality, variety, and excellence with style and energy. Almost every businesses is locally owned and operated, and is Portland's equivalent to Auckland's Ponsonby Road district.
3. The historic character has been retained in the fine urban grain, with a concentration of retail activities running for about a kilometer along N Mississippi Avenue and into N Albina Avenue to the north. Areas to the east and west of Mississippi Avenue are largely occupied by 19th century single and double storey detached timber houses. Tupelo Alley is the largest of a number of new apartments being inserted into this street.



View north up Mississippi Avenue, Tupelo Alley on the right.

GETTING IT RIGHT: PLACING THE BUILDING ON THE SITE

1. N Mississippi Avenue: Small shops extend along the full length of this part of the street. Retail/commercial frontages shown in blue.
2. N Failing Street: There is a tram stop about within a 10 minute westward along this street.
3. N Albina Avenue
4. The site accommodation the larger 5-6 storey L-shaped block facing N Mississippi Avenue and N Failing Street.
5. The two smaller three-storey blocks facing N Albina Avenue.
6. Detached housing to the east and west of the development.
7. The north-south laneway (over which the building is sited)
8. East-west laneway.



Tupelo Alley in the historic Mississippi Avenue district..



GETTING IT RIGHT PLACING THE BUILDINGS ON THE SITE

1. The part of the larger L-shaped block facing N Failing Street is 6 storeys high, the visual impact on the street is reduced by setting back the top two floors.
1. The part facing N Mississippi Avenue is five storeys high, with the top floor also recessed.
2. The ground floor accommodates retail space, with a restaurant on the corner. This ensures a continuity of the active retail frontages along N Mississippi Avenue.
3. All apartments either view to the street or the laneways created on the site.
4. Start of the east-west laneway past the restaurant.



View of the L-shaped building on Mississippi Avenue.

GETTING IT RIGHT PLACING THE BUILDINGS ON THE SITE

1. The development is set among a number of laneways (alleys) crossing the site. These create safe and amenable pedestrian areas for both residents and public, create outlook areas for the apartments, and successfully divide the large block up into a series of smaller sites
2. Corner apartment view to both N Albina Avenue, and into the laneway.
3. Only apartment viewing into the laneways have balconies, that enhances passive surveillance.
4. All apartments are accessed from internal corridors, with the ground floor units set back and separated from the public walkway by planting boxes and landscaping.
5. The 5-storey block facing N Mississippi Avenue.



View along the pedestrian lane from N Albina Avenue towards Mississippi Avenue running between the two rear blocks.

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2. Corner apartment view to both N Mississippi Ave, and into the laneway.
3. Apartments have windows, courtyards and balconies addressing the laneways, making them feel overlooked and safe.
4. All apartments are accessed from internal corridors, with the ground floor units set back and separated from the public walkway by planting boxes and landscaping.
5. The 5-storey block facing N Mississippi Avenue.



View along the pedestrian lane from Mississippi Avenue towards N Albina Avenue running between the two rear blocks.

GETTING IT RIGHT PLACING THE BUILDINGS ON THE SITE

1. Laneway running from N Albina Avenue westward to the entrance lobby of the L-shaped block
2. Entrance to the 5-6 storey block facing N Mississippi Avenue. The lobby connects through to N Mississippi Avenue from where there is another entrance.
3. Ground floor apartments are separated by planting boxes and landscaping, but have no access from the lanes.



View down a laneway leading from N Albina Avenue to the eastern entrance of the 5-6 storey building facing N Mississippi Avenue..

GETTING IT RIGHT STREET TO FRONT DOOR

1. Three storey high apartment blocks along N Albina Avenue.
2. The building is set back from the site boundary by about 3m to create privacy between the street space and the ground floor apartments. Ground floor apartments are not accessed from the street, but from an internal corridor.
3. The sense of privacy and security is enhanced by the planting boxes and landscaping.
4. 1-2 storey detached houses on the east side of N Albina Avenue.



View north along N Albina Avenue, with Tupelo Alley to the left, and detached housing to the right..

GETTING IT RIGHT STREET TO THE FRONT DOOR

1. The three storey residential apartment blocks facing N Albina Street
2. Main entrance door to the residential block accessed from the street (with discreet street number).
3. The entrance door is set back from the site boundary and public footpath to create a sense of privacy and security
4. Sloping roofs and eaves to these blocks reference the sloping roofs of detached houses on the opposite side of the street.
5. Bicycle parking provided at each entrance.



View to one of the two three-storey blocks facing N Albina Avenue..

GETTING IT RIGHT RETAIL INTERFACE

1. A continuity of the active street edge along N Mississippi Avenue is maintained by retail/commercial spaces on the ground floor of the larger block.
2. The development has created new public areas at the ground level, which continue the public through site links.



Retail space along Mississippi Avenue.

GETTING IT RIGHT THE BUILDING

1. The building is constructed of timber framing, with fibre-cement and weather board cladding. The scale of the building is broken into smaller units by the varied height (three stories as viewed here), the articulation of building elements, and colour.



GETTING IT RIGHT THE BUILDING

1. The ground floor and parking basement of the L-shaped block facing N Mississippi Avenue and Failing Street is constructed in concrete. The remain 4-5 floors are timber framing, clad with fibre-cement sheeting. The scale of the buildings is broken into smaller units by the varied height, the articulation of building elements, and colour.
2. The top two floors to N Failing street are set back and distinguished from the lower floors, to reduce the visual appearance of the full 6-storey height.
3. Although connected into a single building, the 5-storey section facing N Mississippi Avenue is visually separated from the 6-storey western block, again to reduce perceived scale.
4. Retail space extends along the length of N Mississippi Avenue.
5. Corner apartments have balconies to the street.
6. Position of the apartment entrance from the street.



View of building from N Mississippi Avenue..

GETTING IT RIGHT OUTDOOR SPACES

1. There is a dedicated outdoor space for residents within the complex, in a recreational area off one of the lanes. This space is overlooked by apartment blocks on both sides. Located mid-block, it is well away from road traffic and safe for children.
2. The development is close to two large city parks



The resident recreational area located in the centre of the development..

GETTING IT RIGHT SITE PLAN

1. Amenities for residents within the complex include a gym, secure parking, outdoor recreational barbeque area, secure bicycle parking, tenant storage area and landscaped outdoor courtyards and laneways.



Resident's gym on the ground floor, viewing into the central outdoor recreational area beyond.
Source: <http://www.livetupeloalley.com/Apartments/>

GETTING IT RIGHT ACCOMMODATING THE CAR

1. Parking is available to residents in a basement garage extending under the larger L-shaped block, accessed off N Failing Street.
2. Pedestrian entrance to the western end to the internal laneway. Resident refuse disposal and secure bicycle storage is accessed off this laneway.
3. Commercial/retail space on the ground floor



Source: <http://www.livetupeloaalley.com>



Entrance to the resident parking area in a basement area.

GETTING IT RIGHT FLOOR PLANS



GETTING IT RIGHT FLOOR PLANS



LEVELS 2-4 KEY PLAN
NTS 1

GETTING IT RIGHT FLOOR PLANS



GETTING IT RIGHT FLOOR PLANS



GETTING IT RIGHT REFERENCES

ADDRESS

3850 N Mississippi Avenue, Portland, Oregon, 97227

Latitude 45° 33' 1.13" N
Longitude 122° 40' 30.69" W

REFERENCES

Tupelo Alley

<http://www.livetupeloalley.com>

SERA: Tupelo Alley

<http://serapdx.com/projects/tupelo-alley>

Case study by Errol Haarhoff and Lee Beattie, School of Architecture and Planning, The University of Auckland, 2015.

All images are by the authors except where otherwise stated.

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