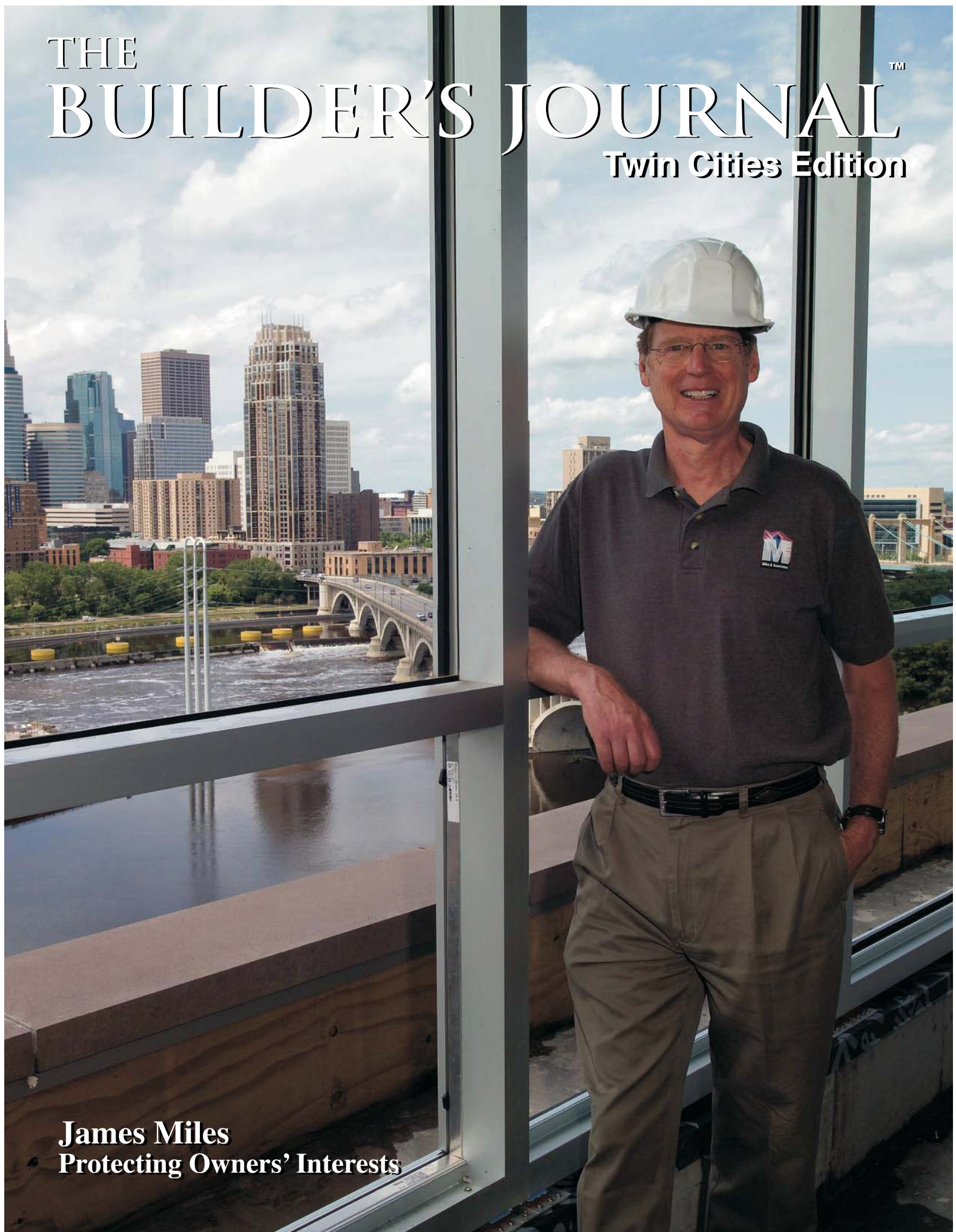


# THE BUILDER'S JOURNAL™

Twin Cities Edition



**James Miles**  
Protecting Owners' Interests

# James Miles

## Protecting Owners' Interests

By Jane Bledsoe

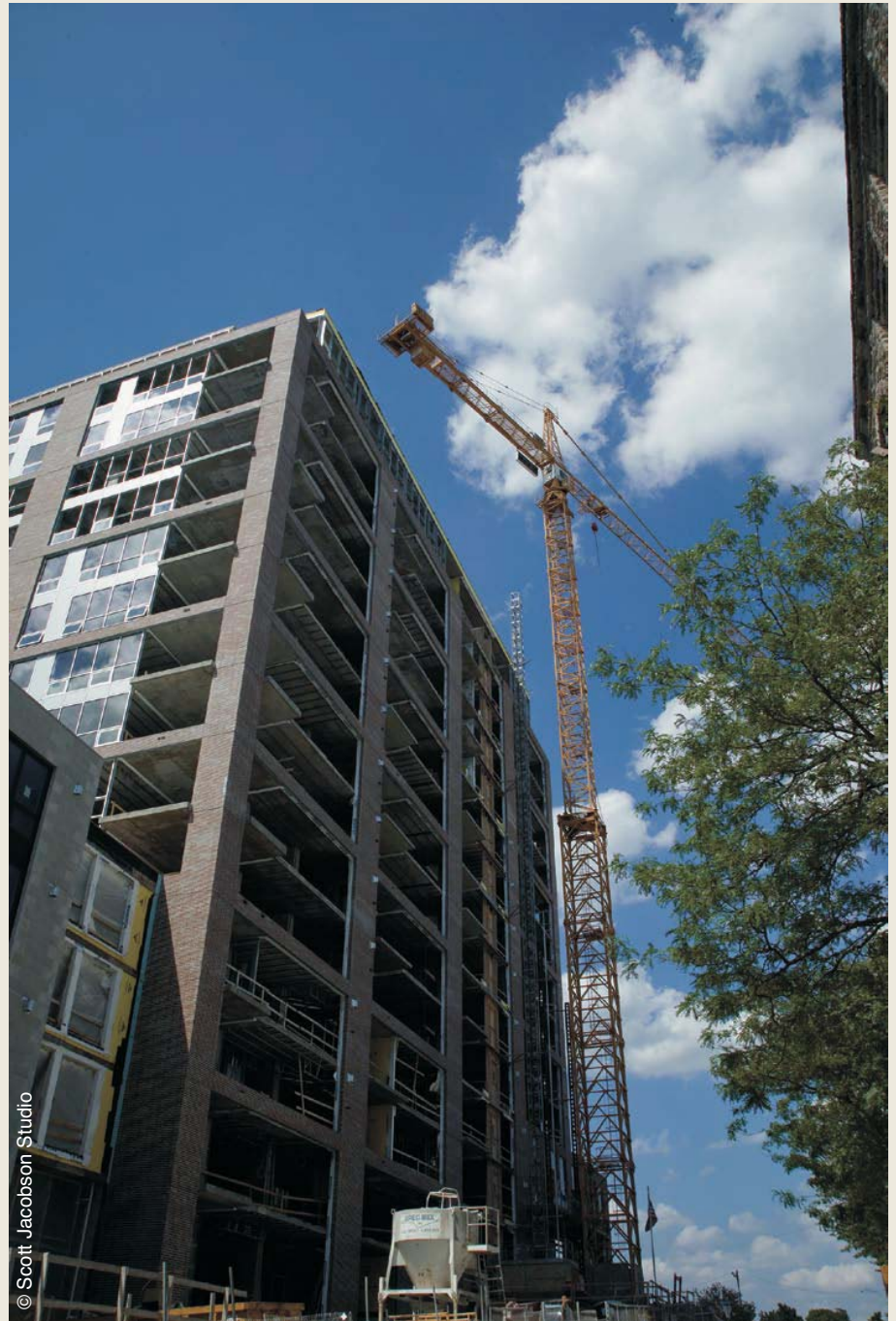
The relationship between architects, contractors, and property owners can be fraught with challenges. When negotiation is required, James Miles is at the top of the list for several large property developers, contractors and owners alike. When James steps in, he gets the project on track again.

“Often my customers hire me when they are just beginning a large project, and sometimes I’m called upon as soon as there is a problem,” says James. “Either way, I’m negotiating throughout the process for the best solution in price and outcome, mainly as the owner’s representative.”

James brings a unique perspective to the negotiating table. As a former architect, developer and general contractor, James has seen it all. “I began my career as a design architect,” he says. “I worked on big projects and small projects for nearly 20 years—mostly on multi-family housing projects.” During his architectural career, James attended a presentation by a real estate developer who talked about the economic necessities of a building, and he was hooked. “I needed to understand that better,” says James. So he went to work for a developer, and then later, a general contractor, but he has maintained a passionate focus on residential buildings—mainly, multi-family homes.

As a result of his unique background, James brings a diverse skill set to the negotiating table.

“We hired James later than we should have, in my opinion,” says Kate McGough, project manager for Aeon, Minneapolis, a nonprofit provider of high-quality apartments and town homes in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. “We had a challenging mixed-use project in Minneapolis that had spanned several years in the design-phase. As a result we had designs that had not been coordinated well between the civil agencies and the architect. When the contractor got underway, he saw that some of the designs were simply not workable—there was duct-work planned in the middle of



© Scott Jacobson Studio  
Phoenix on the River is an 81 unit condominium near St. Anthony Main in Minneapolis with a large amount of project details to manage.

a bathtub, in one instance! It took James to come in and help us make weekly decisions between the design architect and the contractor to get the project moving ahead successfully.”

As an owner’s representative, James plays a diplomatic role. “He’s very solu-

tion-oriented,” adds Kate. “He knows when to push back on contractors, and is a good buffer between all the parties. He watches out for our interests,” says Kate, and she adds, “it would be valuable to bring him in a lot earlier in the process to keep everything on track.”



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Creativity was paramount when designing and building this home to fit into the tight quarters of a Minneapolis lot.

Owners and contractors alike appreciate James' style and knowledge on a job. "I've worked with James for more than 20 years," says Dale Forsberg of Watson Forsberg, a local contractor. "His common sense approach and good knowledge of the entire process, makes him a good partner," says Dale.

Dale describes James' problem-solving style with an example of a \$10 million community project in Coon Rapids, Minnesota, built in the 1980s, where nine of 10 buildings had been completed, but the 10th gave rise to several challenges. "We were building in a large open area," says Dale. "And the soil had been good, except when we got to the site of the 10th building. We couldn't build it where we had planned as a result. But with James on the project, he was able to help us make some solid, quick decisions to re-orient the building and deal with all the excess



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One of the only new constructed free-standing homes in downtown Minneapolis was constructed by Miles & Associates. It was a complicated project.



© Scott Jacobson Studio  
 These beautiful Falcon Heights townhomes were designed by Miles & Associates.

excavation issues. His understanding of the construction process kept the project on budget and on time. He is a problem-solver, a hard worker with a good grasp of all the details we encounter,” adds Dale.

**Over his many years in the construction business, James has seen some common themes emerge**

**where his expertise is required:**

**Technical issues:** The building process can be very complex, and not readily understood by owners. “I like to put things in plain English for people,” says James. He frequently interprets regulations, building code and other technical building requirements to help owners understand

what they can push-back on, and what they cannot.

**Financial:** James states that the building industry currently has its challenges, with some suppliers going out of business. Although he states that the ‘doom of housing’ described by the media is overplayed, he is sometimes involved in aligning alternative resources for projects, when budget or insolvency dictates.

**Regulatory:** James views the regulatory environment as a ‘good thing.’ He states that it “evens the playing field for everyone.” But often different municipalities have different regulations, and that can be tough to manage for an owner and developer building in multiple locations. James often works as an interpreter of the regulatory environment to ensure compliance.

**Environmental:** Building ‘green’ is the most recent and important trend in building in which owners and developers alike are finding a common interest. “We are becoming more environmentally



© Scott Jacobson Studio  
 Character and convenience combine in these well-planned, conveniently located townhomes.



© Scott Jacobson Studio

Contemporary architecture blends concrete, metal and wood into a striking arrangement.



© Scott Jacobson Studio

Although this home was positioned on a small lot outside, spaciousness abounds inside with soaring ceilings and large airy windows.

conscious and owners and builders alike want to do what's right for sustainability," says James. "I can negotiate on behalf of owners for those things that are worth fighting for, and advise on those that don't really add that much value. Not everything that claims to be energy-efficient, truly is," James adds.

**Keeping the weather out:** "When it comes right down to it, that has been the building challenge for centuries," says James. "We're still trying to keep the weather out." Siding materials, and windows are constantly changing in how they are manufactured which continues to cause new and different technical issues. Staying ahead of the manufacturing trends is an important part of what James offers to his customers.

While multi-family housing has been James' focus for most of his career, he has also designed and built single-

family homes. "I have one of the only newly constructed free-standing homes in downtown Minneapolis," says Sam Kaplan, "and James Miles is responsible for that." When Sam began looking at a townhome development near the river, he realized that he simply wanted and needed more space than a single unit would give him. "James made many commitments during the building process, and he kept every one of them. Our new home is large and it was complicated to build with large spans of space required between beams. Anytime we had an issue in the process, James told me he would take care of it, and he did."

James sees a revitalization going on in the urban core of the city, as more and more people are moving back into the city for proximity to work and entertainment, and to limit energy costs.

"Multi-family housing is the business to be in now," he says. "There's just more demand for it than ever—from an affordability and space availability standpoint. I'm here to make owners' and developers' jobs in the multi-family housing market a little easier."

"Even with 15 years of experience in real estate development," says Marcia Cartwright, real estate developer with Hope Communities, Minneapolis, "James still teaches me things. My recommendation to other developers and owners is, 'bring him on as soon as possible.'"

*James Miles, Miles & Associates, can be reached at 612-328-1981 or at [www.milescm.com](http://www.milescm.com). You can also read his blog at [www.milescm.blogspot.com](http://www.milescm.blogspot.com), where James describes several design challenges and how he has remedied them.*