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REAL ESTATE / HIGH-RISES

Living Large in Memorial City

Houston's City Within a City Goes Bold With Hotel ZaZa Apartments and Walkable Perks Galore

BY CHRIS BALDWIN // 11.13.18



$\frac{1}{10}$ *The McCarthy sits atop Hotel ZaZa.*

Standing on the sky lounge balcony, looking out on Memorial City spreading out all around him, Jason Johnson sees the future. In many ways, this future is a continuation of the audacious vision set out by his grandfather, Joseph Johnson, who purchased 200 acres of largely cattle and farm land in 1959, and talked openly of building “a city within a city.” That city is already here — and only growing.

Now, the urban living is catching up.

“People want to live by where they work,” Jason Johnson says. “More than ever, they want to live by restaurants and entertainment, and exciting things they want to do.”

You cannot do much better on those fronts than living atop a Hotel ZaZa. That is where The McCarthy, MetroNational's new seven-story sky-high apartment complex (it's the top seven stories of the larger Hotel ZaZa tower), comes in. It's one lofty, luxe piece of this new Memorial City urban living puzzle, but it's not the only piece. MetroNational is also set to open The McAdams, a new eight-story mid-rise just a half mile away on Barryknoll Lane, in January.

And there are already plans for more being worked on in MetroNational's offices.

Jason Johnson is the youthful-looking president of MetroNational, the company started by his grandfather in 1954, the one that built Memorial City Mall and everything around it. Memorial City hasn't been an offshoot section of Houston for awhile now. It is its own epicenter — and these new developments reflect that. It has also almost quietly become one of the most walkable areas of Houston.

As Johnson leads me on a tour of The McCarthy, rattling off most of the complex's details without looking at any notecards or reference materials, dressed in a perfectly-pressed suit on a hot Houston day, it becomes apparent that this is a development firm that means business. One with a sharp fixation on the details.

"We've always been a forward-thinking company and that continues today," Johnson tells *PaperCity*. "We have a vision for the future."

It is probably a vision that exceeds others' expectations. After all, it would have been unthinkable to imagine a Hotel ZaZa in Memorial City just a decade ago. And no one defied limited thinking quite like Johnson's grandfather with that original Memorial City land purchase.

Now, with the ZaZa going strong, the luxury apartments above it are on their way toward filling up. While Eloise may have dreamed of living at The Plaza, her hipper cousin would have chosen a Hotel ZaZa.



Residents of The McCarthy get their own almost hidden door into the hotel — and their own entrance and drive to the apartment complex’s separate lobby. With only 133 units, this is a retreat within a retreat rather than sprawling place designed to just fit the maximum number of apartments in.

Of course, residents who desire the party vibe only need to slip out and drop into Hotel ZaZa’s well-known pool scene. The party’s almost always downstairs when you want it — and easily shut away when you don’t.

The McCarthy also has its own more chill pool, available only for residents.

Adding to the beck and call vibe that Richard Gere’s *Pretty Women* character would appreciate, McCarthy residents can use Hotel ZaZa’s complimentary car service (everyone recognizes these distinctive SUVs) for trips within three miles of the building.

Just another component for that rare walkable Houston lifestyle vibe.

“You could live here, work here and play here and not need a car most days for sure,” Johnson tells *PaperCity*.

The New Memorial City

The city within a city is all grown up — and continuing to grow. That means more options — from living on top of Texas' hippest hotel brand to the brand new 333-unit McAdams mid-rise. With its rooftop infinity pool and pet park with a view, The McAdams is targeting the young professionals who work at the nearby hospitals and office buildings.

With more and more distinctive restaurants in the area, it's about embracing what is outside your front door. Or at least, a short walk away.

In the case of The McCarthy that walk does not ever have to leave your building. Hop in the elevator for a quick zoom down to Hotel ZaZa's ground level restaurant, Tipping Point, which brings an impressive patio scene. There's nothing like being a regular at a cool restaurant knowing that *your* bed's actually just upstairs.

You're not a mere hotel guest. This is your home.

With the Texas economy booming along again, more and more people are still moving in, looking for a home. And maybe a city within a city.

MetroNational's plans certainly do not include slowing down.

"As Houston continues to add more jobs, there is going to be more and more demand for distinctive residences," Johnson says.

Everyone has to live somewhere. Some homes just happen to be more unique. Some are even within a hip hotel.

That's suddenly the Memorial City life, too.