



Press Release

January 9, 2019

Skanska Announces MONA Fresh Italian Food as Newest Tenant in Understory at Capitol Tower

Upscale Build-Your-Own Pasta Concept Signs Long-Term Lease, Will Open Second Area Location at New Culinary Market in Downtown Houston

HOUSTON – Skanska, a leading global development and construction firm, announced today that it has signed a long-term lease with MONA Fresh Italian Food for [Understory](#), the 35,000-square-foot community hub and culinary market at Capitol Tower. MONA, a unique chef-driven concept combining the swiftness of a fast-casual restaurant with the sophistication of upscale surroundings and high-quality Italian cuisine, will occupy 525 square feet of the 9,000-square-foot culinary market. Understory is now 50 percent leased with less than a year to go until completion.

“We are excited to welcome MONA and their fresh, upscale Italian fare to Understory, the first culinary market connecting the vibrant street and tunnel life in Downtown Houston,” said Matt Damborsky, executive vice president for Skanska USA Commercial Development in Houston. “MONA’s chef driven yet approachable menu and commitment to sourcing only the finest local ingredients makes them a strong addition to Understory’s diverse lineup of homegrown offerings. We believe the addition of concepts like MONA and an unparalleled location – at the heart of five tunnel connections – will make Understory people’s first choice when it opens to the public in 2019.”

Established in Houston in 2018, MONA is known for serving upscale Italian cuisine using fresh and locally-sourced products. Their five-step menu starts with a base of either house made pasta, panini or salad, before adding fresh veggies, cheeses and garnishes. Guests can choose to add a variety of protein options including chicken, Italian sausage, Bolognese, prosciutto, meatball and burrata, and can customize entrées with homemade sauces, dressings and seasonings. MONA’s Understory location will also feature their signature organic herb gardens of basil and microgreens that customers can cut fresh for added flavor to their newly created dishes.

“We believe Understory at Capitol Tower is the perfect combination of architecture and location for MONA to be even more successful,” said Sidney Degaine, owner of MONA. “MONA’s concept is developed to provide high quality and healthy food with quick service within a perfect time frame for the business crowd.”

This opening at Capitol Tower’s Understory will mark MONA’s second area location and first inside Houston’s Inner Loop, after the opening of their flagship outpost in Katy at 19355 Katy Fwy. in July. MONA joins East Hampton Sandwich Co., Boomtown Coffee and Mama Ninfa’s Tacos y Tortas, a new concept from the operator of The Original Ninfa’s on Navigation, as the first four tenants at Understory. This marks the third area location for both East Hampton Sandwich Co. and Boomtown Coffee, while Mama Ninfa’s is debuting its new concept when Understory opens next year.

Designed by the Michael Hsu Office of Architecture, Understory will be a dynamic experience-based destination that brings the community together through culture, commerce and cuisine. In addition to an abundance of naturally lit community space and a full-service restaurant, Understory will include a culinary market with seven chef-driven concepts and a cocktail bar. A central feature of Understory is the open-air blending of the street and tunnel levels, facilitated by the “Great Steps,” a 30-foot-wide monumental staircase and gathering place that will create the first true street level gateway to the tunnel network. This gateway will be highlighted by a large hanging art installation that will be visible from Capitol, Rusk, and Milam streets.

Situated at 800 Capitol St. on a prime block in Houston’s Central Business District, Understory’s location near cultural landmarks such as Jones Hall for the Performing Arts, the Alley Theatre, Revention Music Center, Market Square Park and Wortham Theater – and range of thoughtful amenities - ideally position the space to become part of downtown’s vibrant cultural life. Upon its opening in 2019, Understory will be the first space in the tunnel network to be active seven days a week, from morning to night, with a wide variety of culinary, retail, and cultural offerings. The community will enjoy access to high-speed Wi-Fi, mobile device charging stations, engaging art, games and thoughtful furniture arrangements, as well as a state-of-the-art fitness center for the exclusive use of building tenants.

With a distinctive design that was inspired by the craft of food, Understory will feature approachable, open cooking concepts with high-end finishes to create an inviting space with sweeping views of the street, tunnel entries and market hall. Kitchens will have a warm, handcrafted look, with artist murals, copper clad kitchen hoods, wood butcher block counter tops and white marble. A wide variety of soft furnishings will create a cohesive, yet layered, experience.

When Capitol Tower lights up Houston’s skyline in 2019, it will be the most sustainable office tower in Houston, using 25 percent less energy than typical baseline facilities. Pre-certified under LEED v4 Platinum, one of only four core-and-shell projects nationwide, the 754,000-square-foot sustainable office development will feature a number of green amenities, including the SkyPark, the first and largest green roof in Downtown Houston to be open to all building tenants.

Nick Hernandez, Crystal Allen and Lacey Wilke from Transwestern represented Skanska in the transaction. Franck Agard with Chodrow Realty represented MONA.

Skanska’s other developments in Houston include the first LEED Platinum campus in the Energy Corridor – the two-building [West Memorial Place project](#) - which offers direct access to the Terry Hershey Park hike and bike trails. Skanska also developed 3009 Post Oak, a 302,000-square-foot office building in the premier Uptown Houston location at Post Oak Blvd and Hidalgo.

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