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Reflection Window + Wall provided a complete enclosure for one building at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago.  
*Photo courtesy of Reflection Window + Wall*

## Reflection Window + Wall Named Midwest Specialty Contractor of the Year

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Founded in 2001 by Rodrigo d'Escoto Jr., Reflection Window + Wall is scaling the heights of success as it designs, manufactures and installs enclosures for some of the world's tallest buildings.

The Chicago-based architectural building enclosure company, which specializes in the engineering, preconstruction and project management of facade construction, has cultivated a national and global presence with offices across the U.S. and in Dubai, Shanghai, Manila and Valencia, Spain.

Its national revenue grew to \$209 million in 2023 from \$158 million in 2022, with 95% of last year's total coming from installations of its own enclosure products that include window walls, curtain walls and railings, according to the company.



About 95% of Reflection Window + Wall revenue comes from installation of its own products.  
 Photo courtesy of Reflection Window + Wall

## Back Story

D'Escoto, the firm's president and CEO, is the son of a Nicaraguan immigrant who owned an engineering construction management firm and did cost estimating for the Sears Tower project. The younger d'Escoto was working in sales for a medical supply company in Los Angeles in 1995 when his father suggested he return to Chicago and get into construction because the city public schools had put forward a \$5-billion construction plan that promised work for minority-owned businesses.

Back in Chicago, d'Escoto started a company that required him to learn the art and science of enclosure installation on the job as well as other lessons in managing and growing a business.

"Early in my career, I didn't know anything," he says. "No one teaches you how to find the best insurance, read a contract, understand specifications and the difference between private and public work. I signed bad contracts, and I got schooled."

The company filed for bankruptcy, he notes, "but when we came out of it and started Reflection Window + Wall, everybody gave me work again because I had done it with honor—and we've been growing ever since."



The exterior of a 44-story cylindrical tower at 1 South Halsted in Chicago reflects the nearby cityscape.  
*Photo courtesy of Reflection Window + Wall*

## Launching a Product Line

Those lessons, including the perils of relying on outside product manufacturers, prompted d'Escoto to eventually decide to design and manufacture his own enclosure items. He was tired of receiving calls from suppliers that a product delivery would be late or a needed item was fabricated incorrectly or leaked.

"It's very difficult to make money when you guarantee the performance of a job to a general contractor and the third-party supplier calls and says, 'Sorry, we had a bad day today and we are going to be a couple of months late delivering,'" he says.

A light bulb went off for d'Escoto, who realized he "was always going to be stuck in the middle," adding that "by making my own product, I could make sure that it was on time and met specifications."

Describing what Reflection Window + Wall does, d'Escoto says his company is involved with the product from the start, whether for manufacturing, designing or testing it or for building installation. "We own the full delivery of that product from cradle to grave, and we warranty it," he says.

Today, the company employs about 200, including 100 designers and engineers who advise architects, developers, contractors and others on products, which is a shift from how business was done 20 years ago, d'Escoto says.

"Back in 2001, architects were very prescriptive in what they wanted," he points out. "Now they just say, 'Here's a rendering. Here's the overall performance we need.' As a result, we are doing design-assist across the board."

Reflection Window + Wall also has developed a large internship program, which enables d'Escoto to introduce a new generation to an industry that continues to fuel his own interest and passion. As a former board member of the Hispanic American Construction Industry Association, he also promotes Hispanic participation in the construction sector.

**"We own the full delivery of that product from cradle to grave and warranty it."  
—Rodrigo d'Escoto Jr., Founder, President & CEO, Reflection Window + Wall**



The company worked on a 27-story residential tower in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood.  
*Photo courtesy of Reflection Window + Wall*

## Recent Work

The bulk of the firm's work comes from skyscraper projects, such as The Reed, located at 1400 S. Wabash Ave., and the 311 W. Huron building, both in Chicago; 26-32 Jackson Ave. in New York City; and 1500 Mission in San Francisco. Chicago developer Related Midwest tapped into the firm's expertise for the enclosure of The Row Fulton Market, a 43-story apartment tower in Chicago's West Loop.

"I think the secret sauce of what Rodrigo and his team does is that they understand the specialness that a developer and owner and architect are trying to create with a building," says Don Biernacki, executive vice president of Related Midwest. Team members "work really hard to achieve that without it getting out of whack, which can result in performance issues long term." Biernacki, who says he has known d'Escoto for 15 years, adds that Reflection Window + Wall "thinks out of the box but ... in a careful way."



Reflection Window + Wall installs its RWW 8000 System at Hyde Park Labs at Harper Court in Chicago.  
*Photo courtesy of Reflection Window + Wall*

The reinforced concrete structure at The Row features an exterior of extruded aluminum channels and arched gusset plates connecting beams and columns, all of which reflect the look of structural steel supports of nearby rapid transit system tracks.

“If you look at it, it looks pretty simple, but it isn’t,” Biernacki says. “There are numerous details and a depth of detail which create a shadowing effect. It adds a level of complexity when you are modifying what might be standard and, at the same time, are making sure it performs in terms of strength.”

D’Escoto says the company takes tried and proven products and adapts them as necessary for the benefit of a project and to get the most value for the customer. “This is a far more effective approach in terms of price and performance to those that reinvent the wheel on every project,” he says.

Reflection Window + Wall is often among the first specialty contractors on a job because team members are installing the enclosure that will protect the building and project workers against wind, rain, sun and snow.

“In high-rise construction, everything is about sequencing,” Biernacki says. “If one thing gets out of kilter, then everything gets out of kilter. That’s especially true when you’re enclosing a building and you are fighting the battle of snow and ice.”

A Reflection Window + Wall project stays on track because it “provides field leadership and supervision that are familiar with expectations of quality, and that makes a big difference,” Biernacki says.

According to d’Escoto, Reflection Window + Wall is expanding its product line with a focus on sustainability, starting with low embodied carbon extrusions and glass. The former is defined as material having less than 4 kg of carbon dioxide per 1 kg of aluminum—a carbon dioxide savings of 75% to 85% over current processes, the company says.

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**—Don Biernacki, Executive Vice President, Related Midwest**



The exterior of Row at Fulton Market mimics the look of structural steel supports of nearby transit system tracks.  
*Photo courtesy of Reflection Window + Wall*

## Reinventing Facades

With his interest in sustainability, d'Escoto says he is thinking about “How can I bring value to the future of our industry? How do we navigate a warming planet? How do we provide an affordable product?”

The company’s line of sustainable products, Project Gallo, has received numerous patents and incorporates building integrated photovoltaics and electrochromics, which allow building facades to conserve and generate power. “We are rethinking the way facades create power in a system that is fully upgradable and maintainable from inside the building while delivering the exterior aesthetic the architect desires,” he says.

D’Escoto notes that the product delivers a net carbon negative impact to balance a building’s operational carbon emissions.



"Reinventing the way people look at facades and what a facade is capable of doing from an energy perspective," he contends.



Annemarie Mannion is editor of ENR Midwest, which covers 11 states. She joined ENR in 2022 and reports from Chicago.