

The Globe Mills project houses 145 lofts and apartments.



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Modernity Leave

DESIGNERS BRING NEW PERSONALITY TO HISTORIC BUILDINGS

by J.T. Long

The “Three Rs” mantra of the green movement — recycle, reduce, reuse — is challenging Capital Region architects to bring new life to century-old buildings. Code limitations coupled with increased price tags for demolition and rare materials send some designers heading for the blank canvas of the suburbs. However, the lure of signature projects, strategic locations and time-tested charm has inspired many to reach new creative heights by injecting modern personalities into old buildings.

As anyone who has dabbled in real estate knows, one of the main reasons anyone takes on a development project — new or old — is location. Historic buildings often boast prime urban addresses, making a successful reuse more appealing to possible tenants.

Capital Hotel's position on a prominent corner of Woodland's Main Street was part of the allure for Tim Mullikin, president and CEO of Pilot Properties Inc. The 12,000-square-foot Italianate building was a brick shell when he saw it two years

ago. "All we had were photos of the exteriors with Model Ts lined up in front, and we had to guess, based on similar buildings, what was inside," Mullikin says.

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In place of the barbershop, saloon and hotel that anchored the corner in 1868, McCandless & Associates Architects Inc. made

room for Capital Saloon & Grill on the ground floor, 4,000 square feet of office space on the second floor and five lofts on the top floor. To keep the historic building as true to form as possible, a 3,000-square-foot addition behind the building houses the accessibility features required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The juxtaposition of modern amenities with historic charm seems to have a market despite the down economy. Although the building isn't scheduled for completion until February, three of the five lofts have already been leased. Location was the motivation behind Anova Architects Inc.'s decision to adapt and reuse an 1830s brick building for its offices in downtown Placerville. "We wanted to stay where people could walk to restaurants and stores but had outgrown our current space," says Anova principal Jeffrey Lubenko. "It was really a lifestyle decision."

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Shannon Bolick, Jeffrey Lubenko and Charlie Downs of Anova Architects Inc. outside the 1830s Fausel building in Placerville

PHOTO: TERENCE DUFFY



The former Davis City Hall is now a restaurant, 33rd Street Bistro.

To make room for 81 staff members in the firm's Placerville office, the owners purchased the three-story Fausel house a block from Main Street, shored up the walls with an internal skeleton of cables, crowned it with a structural roof and moved it 30-feet onto a new foundation. Polishing this gem required replacing the limestone mortar and meticulously rebuilding the porch and woodwork preserved only in photographs. "Adaptive reuse requires a scalpel," Lubenko says. The resulting space will be leased as professional offices.

Another attraction of restoring neglected historic buildings is the possibility of using the renovation to leverage more improvements in the area. Sparking a much-needed Renaissance in Sacramento's Alkali Flat was on architect Michael Malinowski's agenda when he and developers Cyrus Youssefi

and Skip Rosenbloom decided to bring the 1913 Globe Mills back to life.

The revamp included the addition of 114 low- and moderate-income senior apartments and 31 market-rate lofts carved from the concrete silos. Rudolph Harold, who designed Sacramento City Hall, designed the original Globe Mills. It was an anchor for a vibrant food-processing center that included Crystal Cream and Butter Co. and the California Almond Growers Exchange. The Globe Mills water tower served as a city marker long after owner Pillsbury Co. abandoned the complex in 1969 to vagrants, fire and the elements.

Malinowski, founder of Applied Architecture Inc., says the development has a role in bringing life back to a forgotten corner of the city. But while location and impact can be strong

magnets for taking on historic reuse, code and preservation restrictions require architects to tread carefully.

Most old buildings come equipped with a great deal of community interest. "People strongly support — and strongly watch — efforts to reuse old buildings," says Paula Boghosian, a principal at Historic Environment Consultants, who worked on a portion of the Globe Mills environmental impact report.

Malinowski's team held extensive community meetings and went through 13 planning phases before the final configuration of new and preserved buildings was approved. The complexity of the new construction sandwiched between historic buildings required a new way of managing the entitlement, and by pairing city and development team counterparts, the project was able to move through the process in stages.

Despite everyone's best intentions, not all historic elements can be recreated. "You have to identify the main

character-defining features of a building to preserve, and then creatively find new ways to use the space," Boghosian says.

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Preserving industrial buildings can be a difficult sell, but Boghosian sees them as equally important to the iconic

civic buildings because they reflect the lives of the people who inhabited them. In the case of Globe Mills, the 24 silos were an important characteristic of the site and one of the most difficult to adapt to residential use. To make way for stairways and elevators, contractors cut into the 8-inch reinforced concrete tubes using suspension systems that allowed them to hang from the five-story ceiling in cages while they used hydraulic saws to bring light into dark recesses.

The first phase is completely filled, and a waiting list from remaining units is getting longer by the day. To ensure the project will continue to have a positive impact on the community, operator Youssefi hired a hands-on management team that knows each tenant by name.

As for inciting neighboring redevelopment, in August, San Diego-based MetroNova Development announced it was building work force housing on the

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site of the abandoned Crystal Cream buildings one block over.

"There is a brutal honesty in an urban ruin ... that was once a key part of Sacramento's fabric. From that rawness comes a kind of visual poetry," Malinowski says.

Often the biggest challenge to adaptive reuse is overcoming interim uses. In 2003, when Malinowski and partner Youssefi converted the 1910 Hotel Stockton into a mixed-use commercial and apartment space, they first had to do away with asbestos, wiring and ventilation installed in the 1970s. Malinowski saved the mosaic floor tile, and millwork was recreated based on archive photos. "We had to be creative," Malinowski says.

As with many historic projects, code compliance was a major challenge. The State Historic Building Code allows for variations from the Uniform Building Code as long as safety measures are maintained. Although the building was

added to the National Register of Historic Places as the first steel-reinforced concrete building in the Central Valley, it didn't comply with modern seismic standards. Sacramento-based Miyamo-

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to International solved this problem by designing giant shock absorbers that allow the walls to move together to avoid breaking.

Although adaptive reuse can be more expensive than greenfield devel-

opment, it also opens up a number of public funding sources designed to pay for the community benefits of preserving an architectural piece of the past.

Christine Fedukowski, acquisitions manager at National Trust Community Investment Corp., estimates that the National Park Service's Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program can cover about 20 percent of nonacquisition or new construction costs of rehabilitation. In 2007, the service approved 1,045 projects totaling \$868 million in tax credits. Many developers form limited partnerships with institutional investors like NTCIC to realize upfront equity and get the project built.

A patchwork of grants, loans and tax incentives are also available from local sources. The city of Sacramento's Historic Places Grant Program provides grants from \$1,000 to \$24,999 with matching funds.

Of course, these funding sources come with their own restrictions and approval

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timelines. City funds require compliance with state's prevailing wage agreements.

Although adaptive reuse rules can be more flexible than a restoration project like that at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, which had to be accurate down to the gold leaf, projects like the Woodland Hotel also have to meet certain preservation standards. Mullikin, who used federal tax credits on the Woodland Hotel project, cautions: "If you use the wrong window latch, you could be disqualified."

Globe Mills' \$38 million renovation was funded by public and private funding that leveraged \$12.97 million from the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency to bring in \$7.5 million in federal Housing and Urban Development dollars and \$1.45 million in federal loans for affordable housing. By cobbling together preservation dollars and affordable housing funds, Malinowski was able to meet multiple objectives.

Hotel Stockton included \$20 million from the California Tax Credit Allocation Committee, federal tax credits and city and private investment.

Often, the cost of renovating is almost the same as the cost of tearing down and starting over. However, the appreciation for historic buildings makes the extra work worthwhile, says Robert Lindley, principal at Y.H. Lee Associates in Davis. Lindley turned the abandoned 1920s City Hall into a restaurant for SRO Inc., the group that owns the 33rd Street Bistro chain. In this case, tearing down the building, which had also served as the city's police and fire station over the years, was not an option.

Harrison Construction & Restoration squeezed the kitchen under a low concrete ceiling where the jail once sat. Workers also removed a 12-inch thick concrete wall and replaced it with enough structural steel disguised as elegant pillars to withstand an earthquake. "We really had no choice but to be creative," Lindley says.

Like any development project, adaptive reuse is a balancing act, Fedukowski says. "You have to consider the fundamentals of the building, current market demands and the cost effectiveness of the project. Then go in with your eyes open." ©