

The revamped building preserved many of its original features, including the bay windows.

RESIDENTIAL REHAB

Ridgeway Studios

It would have been much easier to tear down the old Ridgeway Studios and start over. Instead, CFY Development Inc. chose to update the building – vacant for seven years – while respecting the original elements that make it part of downtown Sacramento's fabric.

"It's been there for at least 100 years. It's got a great history, which is one of the reasons we were motivated to preserve this structure," said Ali Youssefi, vice president of CFY Development.

Located on 12th between I and J streets, Ridgeway is one of the few downtown buildings still featuring bay windows, which were a common feature when the Ridgeway was built. Another reason for the project: making sure there are affordable places to live downtown.

The four-story Ridgeway was never a luxurious place even when brand new. Each of the original 58 units measured only about 150 square feet and had no kitchen or bathroom, though some had sinks. The original design had one toilet per floor, and a tiny community "kitchen" area with a sink and some counter space.

Originally built as a hotel, it gradually became a residential hotel before being abandoned.

"It was as grim a living environment that you could find anywhere in the country," said architect Michael Malinowski, president of Applied Architecture Inc. His job as the project's archi-

tect was to balance comfort with history.

The rehab involved combining spaces to create 22 units of about 400 square feet, each with its own kitchen and bathroom.

The number of units was crucial. Because the city of Sacramento doesn't want downtown's single-room-occupancy inventory to shrink, units can't be destroyed unless others are built. The Ridgeway project was able to lose 36 units only because of the construction of the 7th and H Street Housing Community a half-dozen blocks away. Three dozen of the 7th and H units were identified as replacement inventory, allowing Ridgeway to drop down to a total of 22 units.

It still wasn't an easy fit.

"I had to save more than 50 percent of the interior walls because of code requirements. If you disturb 51 percent, the building has to meet current code," Malinowski said. There was no way to upgrade it that much. The windows, for example, extend out to the property line. The building features a four-story open staircase, now considered a fire hazard.

"One person burning their bacon at breakfast would trigger evacuation of the entire premises," he said.

To create a pattern that would work, he moved a hallway and filled in one of the light wells to gain some square footage. A second light well had

to remain, otherwise some of the units wouldn't have had any access to the outdoors.

Malinowski made use of the city's "alternate materials and methods" rules, applying for a variance that meets the intent of the building code even though it deviates from the letter.

Both the city and the developer wanted to preserve the four-story staircase, but it needed improved fire suppression. Malinowski hit on a section of the building code similar to what is used in prisons, where people can't simply leave the building in an emergency. Instead unobtrusive fire doors are released in case of a disaster.

He also added spaces that were not in the original design, such as a lobby, management office, laundry room, community room and reading area. There was no room for parking, but Malinowski created a corral for bicycles and mopeds.

The new design saves as many original details as it could, including the original window frames, which now hold new glass. Some things have been replicated, such as the brackets on the bottom of the window moldings.

Applying the new design to the old structure meant dealing with an entirely separate set of challenges. The building had been empty since 2007, and was in horrible condition. Thanks to dry rot and years-long leaks, there were some sections of the building that no longer had floors. Thanks to the resident pigeons, roaches and rats, Malinowski had to wash his shoes after the early

STORY BY

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DENNIS McCOY

walk-throughs. "That was a really scary environment to work in until we were about half-way through," he said.

Like many old buildings, the Ridgeway held some conundrums. No one knew why there were some windows sealed up inside walls. The construction itself was odd, with three stories of wood over a brick first floor. Most buildings of that era are either one or the other.

Regardless, the renovations included shoring up the bricks for seismic safety, extending some work that had been started by previous owners in the 1980s. "We stripped everything down to the bare framing. There are no hidden surprises in there anymore," Malinowski said.

He and CFY also wanted to avoid surprises with the city. "You can't go through the normal plan-check process. I had meetings with all the key inspectors before we even started the detailed design," Malinowski said.

The Ridgeway got an entirely new heating, ventilation and air conditioning system, all new electrical wiring and plumbing, plus new sprinklers and fire alarms.

"You need people who are experienced to do challenging rehabilitation projects," Youssefi said. His crew was especially qualified for this project. Superintendent Jim Kennard of CFY had even worked on the Ridgeway once before, as an entry-level construction worker when the previous owners started the 1980s rehab.

Even when ripping the interior down the studs, renovating an old building can be expensive. CFY had to pay prevailing wages for someone to pull nails out of 100-year-old wood. But the project still came in on time and on budget.

"I don't think there was a point during the



course of construction that we had to value-engineer out features that we wanted to have," Youssefi said. "If anything, we were able to add upgrades. We were able to put in stainless steel appliances and granite counters."

Money came from several sources. The project was a public-private partnership with participation from the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency. Chase Bank provided a construction loan of \$1.92 million, and the developer was able to get \$2 million in low-income housing tax credit equity from WNC and Associates.

But SHRA suffered along with all other redevelopment agencies in California when the state

put an end to using tax-increment financing.

"Property tax income could no longer be collected and used for redevelopment purposes. But we do have other funding sources that can be used for housing," said Angela Jones, an SHRA spokeswoman. One is the federal Home Investment Partnerships Program, which provides grants to states and cities to be used for rehabbing affordable housing.

As challenging as the Ridgeway was, Youssefi is ready to try another project. "I love old buildings," he said. "To the extent that we can repurpose and rejuvenate buildings in downtown Sacramento, I think that is a great way to reinvigorate it."

FAST FACTS

Location: 914 12th St., Sacramento

Completion date: April 2014

Project size: 13,280 square feet

Total cost including acquisitions: \$7.11 million

Developer: Ali Youssefi, John Cicerone

General contractor: CFY Development Inc.

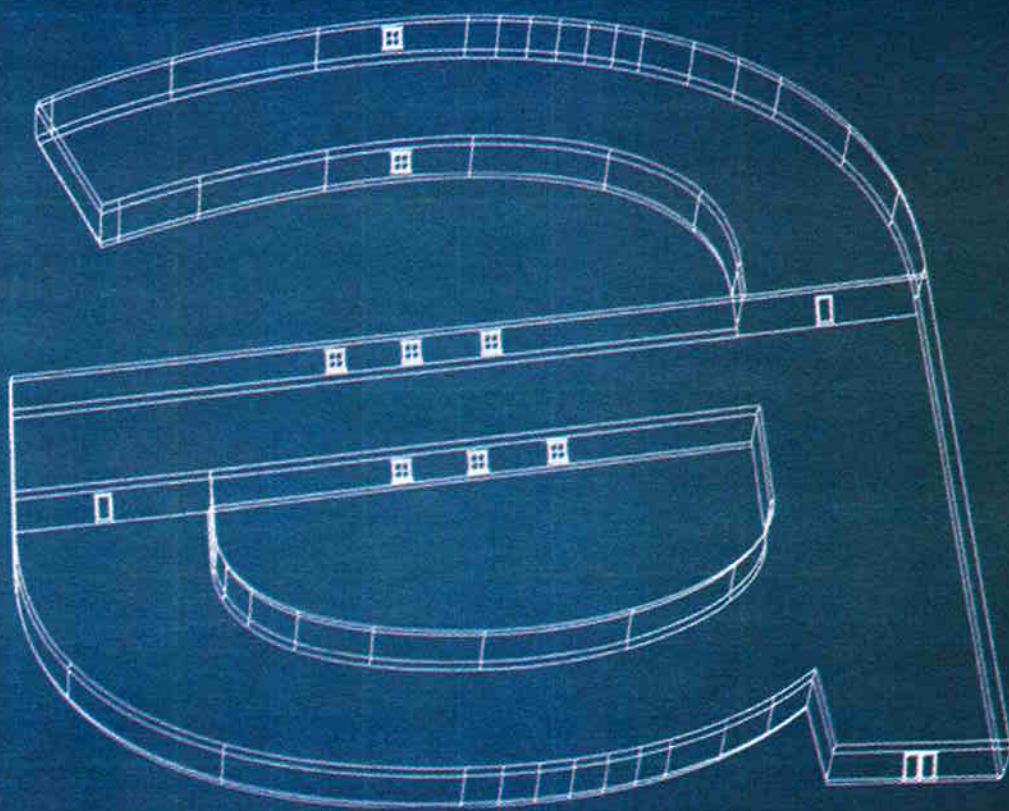
Architect: Applied Architecture Inc.

Civil engineer: HP Engineering Inc.

Structural engineer: Meridian Structural Engineers

Electrical engineer: Citizen Electric

Mechanical and plumbing engineer: Pecha Mechanical Design



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