



# Bel-Vue

Adaptive Reuse of the Historic Bel-Vue Apartments  
 1117-1123 8th Street  
 Sacramento, California

## CFY Development

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## Applied Architecture

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#### Interiors

Azize Youssefi

**The Bel-Vue is a Sacramento historic treasure. Recognized nationally for its outstanding design character and its key part in our history, the completion of a multiyear renovation effort has allowed it to reclaim its position as a Sacramento icon.**

**Just a block from the “heart” of Sacramento and its new arena, the Bel-Vue has brought back the beauty and integrity of its beautiful brick façade, dramatic corbelled cornice that extends over the sidewalk, paneled frieze, large windows and balconettes. The 22 one bedroom apartments on floors one and two are once again full of tenants who enjoy all the modern amenities associated with new construction in a transit oriented location just off light rail. The units which range from 450 to over 900 sq ft have modern kitchens and baths, high efficiency solar collection, air conditioning and appliances, modern security and fire sprinkler systems, new code compliant exiting and accessibility, and a full suite of amenities such as on-site bicycle storage, elevator access to all levels, on-site laundry, meeting, and gathering spaces. At the same time, the Bel-Vue project is steeped in the classic original details and charm such as a new “library themed” lounge with floor to ceiling bookcases and skylights; extensive woodwork, wainscoting, and moldings; beamed and coved ceilings, and even restored claw foot tubs. In bringing the past and future together seamlessly, the Bel-Vue hits on all the key tenets of smart growth, climate action, urban infill, and resiliency. When the street front restaurant space is built out, it will be full of customers as well as residents, a key milestone in the continued renaissance of Sacramento’s downtown.**

Originally constructed in 1909 for \$64,500, the American Cash store was the first mixed-use building of its kind in the region – implementing what was then a new idea: putting apartments above a grocery. This became a model for future mixed use buildings in Sacramento. This innovative design was the first private commission of an architect who would play a key role in California and beyond: George Sellon - California's first State Architect.

When it opened, the American Cash store employed 67 people and was really four stores in one - a grocery store, a delicatessen, a hardware store, and a bakery with one of the largest ovens in the City. It was a nearly 8,000 sq. ft. economic engine, with a full 8,000 sq. ft. basement level for storage, prep, and production of baked goods.

A thriving place of commerce, you could buy just about anything you needed at the American Cash store: tools, potatoes, bread, and pies. In its advertisements, they touted loaves of fresh bread for a nickel – and for less than a quarter you could get a 12 to 16 pound “Lean Eastern” ham.

In addition to the bargains, the building’s second and third floors were occupied by 22 apartments. Each had two rooms and a kitchenette, with light, water and garbage pickup included in the rent that ranged from 22 to 32 dollars a month. Among the early residents in the building were state legislators, a doctor, a state commissioner, two department store managers, and eight bartenders. These were pillars of the community in all ways.

The first setback for the Bel-Vue came early ... within months of opening, it suffered a major fire, making headlines in the news. But the energy and passions that brought it to life quickly overcame this calamity, and it was swiftly rebuilt and opened again for business.

But business and market conditions shifted, and the American Cash store could not keep up. By the end of the 1920’s, it was out of business. The location was so good, however, that other companies moved into the spaces in short order. These included the King Grocery, the Atkinson Meat Market, and the locally, very well known Muzio Bakery which used the massive ovens in the basement to produce bread.

An ownership change in 1936 meant a name change. In the hands of the Spilman-Callister Real Estate Company, the Bel-Vue name came to be. During this era, the Bel-Vue hosted a parade of restaurants and bars including the Prosperity Corner.

After World War II as suburbanization was taking hold, occupancy at the Bel-Vue began to drop. When Spilman sold to the Louie, Fong and Fong Chinese Benevolent Company in 1947, new tenants included the New Tientsin Café and then the Cathay House.

*Fresh Every Day*  
**LIGHT WHOLESOME BREAD**  
**SPECIAL TODAY**  
**10c Loaf for 5c**

**Would You Refuse  
DIMS for Your NICKELS?  
If Not Call for a  
BIG TWIN 10c Loaf for 5c**

**EGGS, 30c Per Doz.**  
**American Cash Store**  
1117-1119 EIGHTH STREET

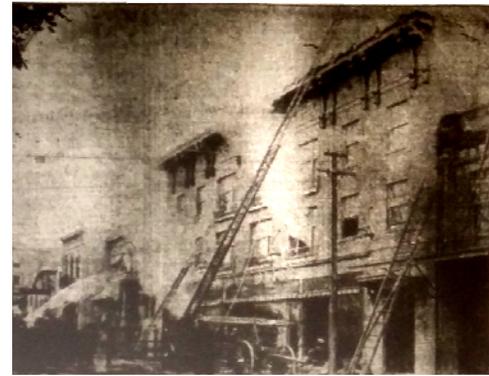
**Elegant Apartments  
American Cash  
Building**

The cosy apartments over the American Cash Store building are now ready for occupancy. This nearness to the business section makes them very desirable.

They are arranged in apartments of two rooms and a kitchenette. Light, water, removal of garbage, care of halls, etc., are included in the rent asked.

Ventilation and window arrangement are most excellent.

**\$22.50 to \$32.50**



**Firemen Fight Downtown Blaze**

More than 40 Sacramento city firemen were sent to fight a stubborn, smoldering blaze late yesterday at the rear of a two-story building housing a restaurant and apartments at 1128 8th St.

Damage was confined to the walls and the floor on the second story.

The restaurant, Holly, which serves Chinese food, remained open during the commotion, which came at the dinner hour.

Deputy Fire Chief Robert Schultze said none of the occupants of the Bel-Vue Apartments were injured.

It took firemen more than two hours to rip the smoldering wood from the walls and floors.

Eighth Street was blocked to traffic for more than three hours.

110A7  
1926

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**MUZIO BREAD AND  
ROLLS AT YOUR  
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**MUZIO BAKERY**  
OF SACRAMENTO  
1119 8th Street Dial 2-7792 Joe Fuchoff, Owner

In 1955, only 13 of the units were occupied. Businesses included a lounge called Holly and Cecil's, followed by Eilish's, and then the Panda Garden that closed in 2009. The Bel-Vue went quiet.

Disconnected from Sacramento's community and business life, the Bel-Vue began to fall apart. Although listed on the Sacramento Register in 1982 and on the National Historic Register in 2016, that was not enough to stop the downward spiral. It was not long before the Bel-Vue was to become a home to vagrants, thieves, mold, and vermin.

What a mess! With a leaking roof, mold grew everywhere. One attempt at a fix for the roof was a quick and sloppy application of spray foam. Everything was foamed – rotted wood, vents, skylight glazing - everything. Even that was not enough to stop the leaks, mold, rot and vermin. And it got even worse. The interior was stripped of piping and wire – even a live electrical service was disassembled and cut apart for bits of copper. Window air conditioners were piled up and broken apart, tubs pulled out, and rats and bats took up residence.

After years of abandonment and failed attempts to get something going in the right direction, someone finally stepped into this mess and saw past it - Ali Youssefi and his dad, Cyrus. They had the stomach for urban problems of the highest order – problems like the Globe Mills, called Sacramento's most blighted property, and the six story city block sized Hotel Stockton, abandoned for years as Stockton's once proud icon became a symbol of its distress.

The Youssefi perspective: "Problems? Let's talk about SOLUTIONS. This place has great bones and outstanding character." They looked past what was right there in front of them and brought both the vision and the resources to chart a new course for the Bel-Vue.

This was no light weight endeavor. It required their secret sauce:

- Courage of the highest order,
- A determination so focused it seemed casual ... "just go build it" Cyrus would say,
- And all that backed by savvy knowledge of the numbers and a network of doers.



This site demanded more than just a roll up of sleeves. It required a team to wade directly into the nightmare of existing conditions. Visits on site lasted for many hours at a time, trying to understand and document what had, over the years, become a labyrinthine interior layout. Pushing through the nastiness with tape measures and flashlights, the team uncovered all manner of mystery:

- Remnants of a lower “street level” – what’s known in some circles as Sacramento’s underground, dating back to when streets were raised a full story due to incessant flooding
- Remnants of even older buildings in the basement
- Secret rooms, one filled with survival rations, and a massive brick oven that probably churned out tens of thousands of loaves of bread
- Oil, pigeon and bat dropping inches deep, mold and dirt, foul things of every imaginable sort
- What first appeared as hundreds of bats, became thousands, and finally millions of bats infesting the attic so completely that specialty measures had to be taken
- And more ...

Finally things began to become clear. There really WERE good bones here. With plans underway, Ali moved boldly to make his vision clear – even tackling the rebuilding of the entire front of the building – going far beyond what code or tax credits required.



Early on, Ali commissioned a series of renderings to crystalize what he envisioned as an elegant, library like lobby of beautiful proportion, lighting, flooring, floor to ceiling bookshelves, and a restored façade brought back to its original glassy storefront and detailed historic charm and character.

He would not be daunted by the huge structural challenges, the dwindling resources in a budget that was supplemented more than once, or the technical obstacles that seemed, each taken separately, nearly insurmountable. One by one, the pins were knocked down. Relentless optimism drove the team forward and when one team player threw up their hands, others stepped in to bolster the forward motion.

It was necessary to add a massive retaining wall across the entire front façade. This was so heavily reinforced, it was very difficult to even get the concrete into the forms required so it could take all the earthquake loads down past the basement level. New walls had to be added inboard of the existing exterior walls all around the building to provide support in the event an earthquake damaged the original brickwork.

Along with pits for the elevator, new utility connections, and even a dropped section in the basement for the electrical service since it turned out the new panels needed simply could not be bought to fit ... we needed more height than we actually had. “Hey, Jim, can you take care of that ... Sure, no problem, Mike.” Debates with engineers, electrician, and concrete subcontractors ... happened on an almost daily basis.

That damn sticky messy roof foam did get removed ... and the original 100+ year old glass in the skylights once again let light pass through. The rotted roof framing was replaced, and even more was replaced to address the bat issue.

Interiors started to look more inviting ... and bright. Conundrums resolved ... such as how to keep historic walls while creating kitchens that met current requirements ... yes, there is way to do both.

Original fixtures ... saved!

What started as a simple adventure in May of 2016 with an email from Ali: “Mike – I’d like you to take a look at a pretty straightforward downtown project we can acquire from the Kings ... just 22 units, not that big ... “. Fast forward to September 2019.

So much had happened. It was a hard project in every way – schedule, money, loss of all kinds. The greatest challenges were in



the emotional tidal wave that comes from the deepest personal loss imaginable. Two young men passed away during the course of the project: Ali, son of Cyrus and Fetnah Youssefi, brother to sister Ladi, newlywed to wife Azzie ... and Roger, the son of Project Superintendent, Jim Kennard, and his wife, Julie, brother to Mike.

In the face of great grief and loss ... the Bel-Vue has been completed.



Reconnected to the City in which it was born.



Thanks Ali and Roger ... what an adventure!

Michael F. Malinowski FAIA, April 2020