



ADAPTATION

PONCE CITY MARKET'S EVOLVING STORY

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BY
DENNIS HERTLEIN,
AIA, LEED AP

Surber Barber Choate & Hertlein began our work on the historic Sears Building over ten years ago and being involved for this extended period has given us a unique perspective on the importance of the adaptability of buildings.

In our current world of abundant access to information and hyper connectivity, an ever increasing pace of change seems to be the new normal. In addition, as a society we are more focused on being better stewards of our planet's valuable resources. With these thoughts in mind, our buildings need to be both durable and adaptable.

When the original Sears Building was planned almost 100 years ago, solid construction practices were a given. The Sears and Roebuck Company was a great American success story, and as they grew they needed huge warehouses and distribution centers in each region of the country to advance their business model. From 1920-1930 they built 13 of these unique structures. The buildings were typically connected to rail lines and they were all



BEFORE



AFTER

laid out with a consistent 20' grid of concrete columns that supported eight to ten stacked floors for storage of their merchandise. Each building shell was constructed with thick masonry walls and large steel windows to allow for natural daylighting and ventilation. This same simple and logical layout was repeated in each of the 1929, 1946, and 1966 additions to the original 1926 building. The end result was a two million square foot complex that allowed for the efficient storage and distribution of everything from shoes to house parts.

SBCB first began work on the project in 2004, and almost immediately, it became apparent to us that the existing building layouts could work well for a wide variety of new uses. The initial development program envisioned the upper floors as multi-family units with the street level being transformed into retail stores and restaurants. After studying a variety of layout options, a breakthrough occurred when we realized that the same grid of columns could also work well for parking cars. The 1966 wing was too wide for daylight to get to the center so by placing parking on the upper floors of this wing, it became possible for the “ugly” 1966 parking decks that dominated the street frontages on North Avenue, Glen Iris, and Ponce de Leon to be removed. This then allowed the design team to sub divide and break up the scale of the mega block and add the potential for several new buildings.

After establishing the initial overall vision, we continued to work with the rest of the development team to establish a dense program and design solution that ultimately won the City's approval. This was followed by continued collaboration with the neighborhoods, resulting in the required rezoning. The project was progressing nicely and all appeared ready to move forward. In the interim, the economy had begun to change and the necessary investors did not jump aboard. This led to long periods of limbo interspersed with occasional interest and further reconsideration of different programmatic uses. With each new opportunity, the building continued to prove itself to be able to accommodate a wide range of options.

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Ponce City Courtyard

In 2011, Jamestown showed a sincere interest in the project. SBCH was fortunate to be able to assist with their initial due diligence analysis and we were able to demonstrate the building's overall adaptability. With the lingering effects of the Great Recession still prevalent, there was not a single clear market sector that was demanding to be addressed. For some developers this might have been frustrating but for Jamestown it was ideal as it allowed them to initially envision the project with an open mind. Their vision focused more on the creation of a unique place that would give the building a strong image, identity, and community appeal. This meant growing the retail/restaurant component to over 350,000 sf and adding a central Market Hall component. Their original program also anticipated less multifamily and more loft-style office space as well as room for a potential hotel and health club. These fresh programmatic goals were developed into yet another design iteration for the large complex.

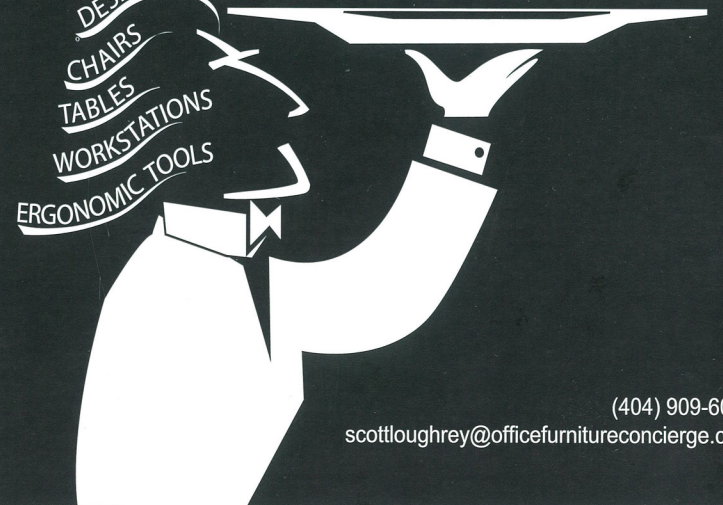
Once the new project vision was finalized, we began to further develop the details as the initial interior demolition and shell restoration work began. No sooner did we have it figured out than the markets began to awaken and changes began again. These new market forces led to subsequent program reconsiderations and several new layout adjustments. The office use was expanded to include the entire northernmost wing along Ponce de Leon, the hotel component was transformed into more residential units, and the overall quantity of restaurants tripled. New plans were therefore being tested and advanced while the building was under construction. Once again, with all of these new ideas thrown its way, the building continued to allow itself to be readily adapted.

As the project nears completion and tenants begin to move in SBCH is anxious to see how well each of the new uses works out. We have no doubt that with the passing of time things will continue to change and something tells us that the building will continue to welcome further adaption for many years to come. Looking at this all from a bigger perspective, we believe that there is something to be learned when we are all designing our new buildings. Simpler layouts and durable construction allow for adaptation and this is good. After all, today's new construction will someday be the future's adaptive reuse projects.

Dennis Hertlein has been a Principal of Surber Barber Choate & Hertlein Architects, PC for over 15 years.

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