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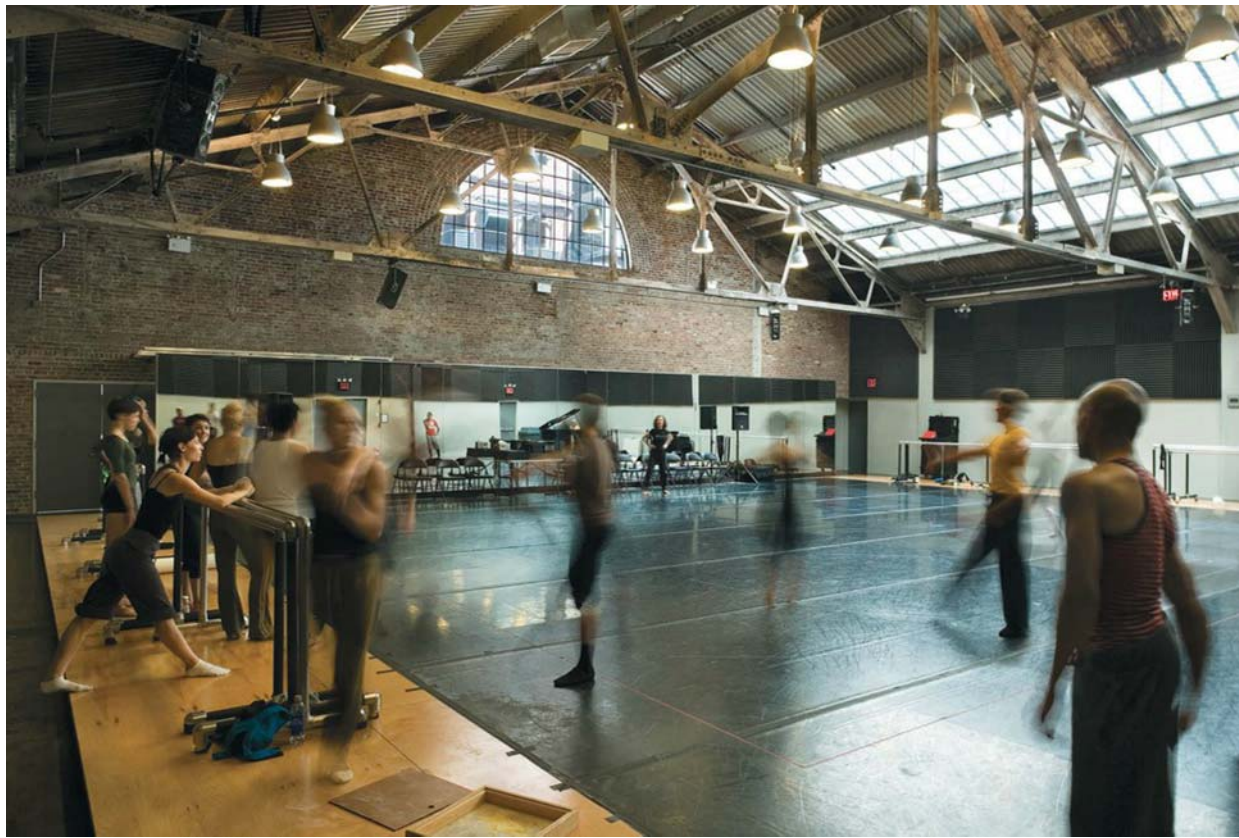


NEW YORK METRO

Old Buildings, New Life

Designers turn to adaptive reuse as a sustainable way to transform historical buildings into contemporary spaces.

By Caitlin Kelly



John Wallen

Two Chelsea garages on West 26th Street are now the rehearsal space and theater for the Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet.

Is there a more challenging project than designing a space for a school of design? That was Gensler’s job when chosen to create a new campus for the Graduate Program of the New York School of Interior Design.

“The school is in two historic Upper East Side buildings, and there’s no room for expansion,” explains Ellen Fisher, vice president for academic affairs and dean. So NYSID sought a new space that would reuse an older building and adapt it for the 21st century.

“We were going for LEED Platinum certification, so we needed abundant natural light and a place that would give us the ability to create a LEED facility,” Fisher says. The school found a 12-story, 104-year-old building at 401 Park Ave. S., acquiring the second and third floors, which had previously been used by another college.

The result, says Fisher, meets their needs perfectly, even coming in under budget. “You

always know you’re in a historic building, thanks to details like the original windows, but tucked inside it is this very contemporary space. That mix, that contrast between old and new, is also part of our design education. The values of the school are an appreciation for the fabric of New York City architecture and a love of design history.”

While the building shell remains, the interior uses clear red panels as walls, has no classroom doors and created wide hallways to promote easy conversation and collaboration. Red is NYSID’s signature color, and its East 70th campus sports a fire-engine-red door.

For Nancy Ruddy, a principal in the New York firm of CetraRuddy, working on older Manhattan buildings, like converting the Barbizon Hotel into condominiums, has proven intellectually satisfying and professionally challenging. “The most rewarding aspect of adaptive reuse projects is developing a critical understanding of



Donna Griffith

"The main challenge was to modernize the space but keep its authentic historic and industrial nature," says Golbou Rad of the St. Lawrence Lofts project.

the building history and its provenance and developing a design that reinforces the building architecture while creating an interior design that has a new spirit," she explains. "The sustainable nature of giving new life to an underutilized structure reinforces the historic context of a city."

Working on the Barbizon, built in 1929, meant relocating the core and elevator shafts to create more gracious spaces with spectacular views from its cathedral windows. "Although the exterior of the building was landmark quality, none of the detailing remained on the building interior. We developed an interior design motif that was a modern interpretation of what might have been in a building of this type built in 1929."

For her work on Walker Tower, one challenge was developing an interior design vocabulary sympathetic to the building's Art Deco provenance of 1931 while creating a style reflecting its downtown Chelsea location. "The unique character of the apartment interiors is the result of a response to the extraordinary metal and brick patterning on the building exterior with custom hand-crafted detailing," Ruddy explains. "The design derives its spirit from 1930's Paris, American Deco and the interpretation of historic details that result from my many years of travel and study of architectural history."



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Made of brick in the early 1900s, the buildings were originally owned and used by photographer Annie Liebovitz.



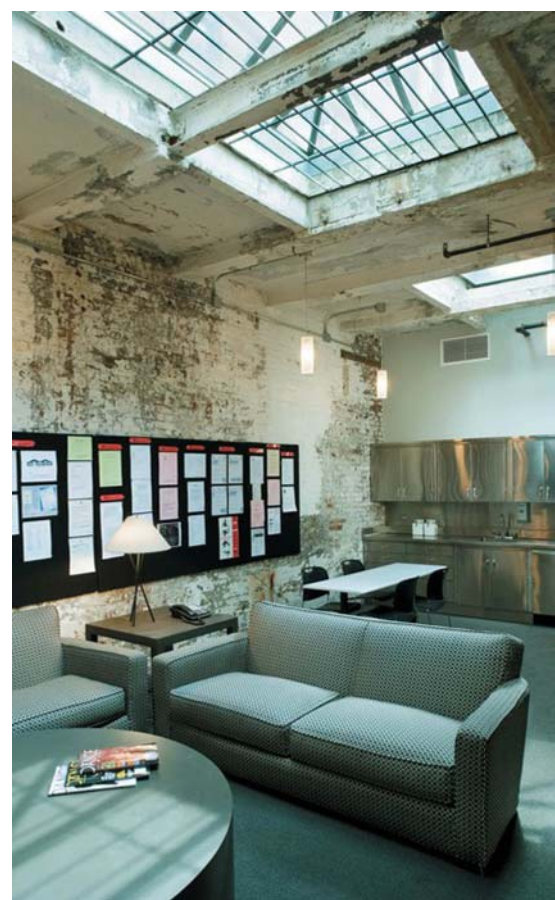
Gensler/Mark LaRosa

NYSID's Graduate Center at 401 Park Ave. S. was completed in 2011. The school worked with Gensler to redesign two floors of the 104-year-old building.



Gensler/Mark LaRosa

"That mix, that contrast between old and new, is also part of our design education," says Ellen Fisher, vice president for academic affairs and dean and an ASID NY Metro Chapter Board Member.



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Completed in 2005, Simone Ghetti retained some of the garages' exposed brick walls, skylights and metal ceilings.

"The development of the design of our adaptive reuse projects always begins with research of the building history and its historic context," she says.

Adaptive reuse projects such as these highlight an important aspect of sustainable design. In repurposing and restoring old buildings, less energy and materials are required to repurpose the space into something new. This eliminates the material waste that would otherwise be created by demolishing an old structure and starting anew.

A different set of challenges faced Simone Ghetti of the New York City architectural firm Platt Byard Dovell White, hired to convert two Chelsea garages on West 26th Street between 10th and 11th, owned and used by photographer Annie Liebovitz. Made of brick in the early 1900s, they offered about 16,000 square feet and are now a rehearsal space and theater for the Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet.

Completed in the fall of 2005 on a \$2.4 million budget, the job was esthetically simple enough, as Ghetti retained some of

the garages' exposed brick walls, skylights and metal ceilings. But the client's need for a movable sprung wooden floor and audience seating meant retaining the original concrete floor – one that wasn't anywhere near level. "In the interests of budget, we decided not to tear out the entire floor. At first we thought it would be easy to deal with, but one of the big challenges was the floor not being flat. It turned out to be more of a hindrance than a positive." Dancers now must shim the stage.

As Nancy Ruddy says – applicable to all projects like this – "sensitive quality restoration and adaptive reuse is always a balance of history, current client needs and project budgets."

Toronto designer Golbou Rad, principal of Rad Design Inc., worked with a young professional couple in their 30s on a 155-year-old building in a downtown neighborhood. They wanted to renovate the outdated kitchen and bathrooms completely and make the overall space more modern, hoping to add value to their property for a future sale.

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Originally a wholesale grocery warehouse, Golbou Rad preserved the building's original masonry, red brick and limestone in her designs for the downtown Toronto apartment.

The property, St. Lawrence Lofts, consists of three attached buildings on Front Street East in Toronto's historic St. Lawrence Market area, built in 1858. They represent a distinct and historic architectural period in Toronto's history, originally serving as a wholesale grocery warehouse backing into the waterfront with ship docks at the rear. Rad worked to preserve the building's original materials of masonry, red brick and limestone.

The final budget for the 1,200 square foot, two-story apartment was around \$47,000, increased from \$30,000 when the client decided to use better quality materials and finishes.

"The main challenge was to modernize the space but keep its authentic historic and industrial nature," she says. "The materials and finishes also had to be quite subtle so we wouldn't take away from the beautiful texture and colors of the brick." Rad also needed to insure that the space not become too "busy," with the original brick and wood already adding a lot of color and texture.

"It was rustic due to its original brick walls, wood beams and roof line/ceiling lines, but our conversion made it into a unique and harmonious blend of modern, industrial and historic."

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