Remodeling

Silk Purse

Jim Cory, Senior Editor

WHAT TO MAKE OF IT

Scannapieco Development Corp. had acquired the much-coveted piece of property along the Delaware River - which divides Pennsylvania from New Jersey in the mid-'80s. After turning the paper mill into condos, Tom Scannapieco was not sure what to do with the brick shell of the power plant. Options were few, because expansion was prohibited.

The first idea was to transform it into a restaurant. The condo association, however, objected to potential noise and traffic problems. Another idea was New York style lofts. That, too, got nixed. Finally Scannapieco decided to transform the shell into an office building. The building would include 10,000 square feet of space on four floors, with views of the river.

COME TOGETHER

The site included not one building but three: the original three-story plant - an open structure with a single floor - plus a smaller two-story newer building adjacent and a 130-foot-high chimney of tile brick, with walls 2 feet thick at the base tapering to the thickness of a foot at the top. The design problem was how to enclose the three into one.Werner's solution was new steel framing attached to the existing frame that supported the building's brick walls. Curtain walls of green-tinted glass would fill the openings between.

Inside, the design called for use of the Hambro steel joist and concrete system for filling floors. Werner placed an inner stair tower and the elevator core between the original plant and the newer building. Then. to save square footage, he added a sculptural steel stair tower outside to provide the mandated second means of egress.

SMOKESTACK DILEMMA

One of the biggest challenges in a consistently challenging project was what to do with the smokestack. Built of tile-faced bricks of three different sizes, it rose 130 feet, more than twice the projected height of the building. The stack is a New Hope landmark. and there was, says Tom Scannapieco, "some sentiment in town not to take it down."

But that was not to be. Instead, to integrate the smokestack into the building, Werner's plan called for shaving off almost half its height and slicing the back half away vertically. a task accomplished with masonry saws. That transformed what remained of the smokestack into a half-cylinder. To bring it within the footprint, floors were extended out to engage the stack, and the two sides of the half -cylinder were joined to the building structure with steel and glass.

American Chimney Corp. a firm specializing in the construction, repair, and demolition of smokestacks. disassembled the smokestack layer by layer, tile by tile. To do this, crews scaled the structure with ladders, cinched brackets in place with cable, and built a platform. The platform descended in 8-foot increments while the smokestack was taken down about 70 feel. What remains rises 56 feet - about 5 feet above the flat roof. The stack is capped with a 12-foot Fiore skylight. admitting sun into fourth-floor executive offices.

Incorporating the smokestack added 800 square feet to the total. 'That square footage in that location opened up the floor plan," Werner explains. "It allowed us to adjoin the two existing buildings and also gave us the best views of the Delaware, because the glass on either side is on the diagonal looking upriver."~ Plus, the chimney and glass walls flanking it make an ideal entrance and reception area.

STABLE FOOTINGS

For Len Scannapieco, troubles started before those drills encountered the air pocket. "You look at a building and make assumptions,"' he says. "But none of the assumptions finally matter, because you can't rely on them. From day to day, you never knew what you were going to encounter."

When the drills hit air, Scannapieco imagined the slab would have to be jack hammered away and the earth beneath it dug to sound, compacted soil dense enough to properly pour footings in which to set the piers for the new steel frame.

"My first thought was. what's the extent of the problem? And what kind of reengineering would have to take place to resolve it? I was more worried about time than cost."

Instead, after a few tests, an engineer told Scannapieco he could pour concrete at six points to create concrete haunches. The inserted piers were then pinned with one-inch rebar into the existing foundation.

SOLID RESULTS

Foundation work wasn't the only problem. For one thing, the brick walls of the shell needed substantial repair. "There was a lot of missing or damaged brick," Scannapieco says. Vern Kratz, a sales rep for supplier Landis Brick Co., located a kiln that could match the deep red of the building's old brick. "A lot of the red brick in buildings around here was made in Reading," Kratz explains. "It was coal-fired, and it's hard to get that deep red anymore." He located a kiln in Watsontown, Pa., that could supply the bricks needed for "patchwork" - repairing windows and putting doors in.

Some bricks were salvaged by chipping and cutting away old mortar. Bricks were repointed, and the new mortar was stained and brushed to match existing.

The Boiler House project, which won a CotY award from the Bucks/Mont (Bucks and Montgomery Counties) chapter of NARI in commercial exterior, took a year to build. Two separate interior design firms completed the inside build-out. The result is a structure that - with its views, interior design. and architecture - is now one of the most expensive office spaces in Bucks County, according to client and developer Tom Scannapieco. He leased the top floors to a NYSE-listed company that relocated from northern New Jersey. The bottom floor he saved for himself. building's old brick. "A lot of the red brick in buildings around here was made in Reading," Kratz explains. "It was coal-fired, and it's hard to get that deep red anymore." He located a kiln in Watson-town, Pa., that could supply the bricks needed for "patchwork" - repairing windows and putting doors in.

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