

Aufgang Architects: "Adaptive Reuse" has growing role in NYC's commercial real estate development



New York, NY Adaptive reuse may be traced back to our cave-dwelling ancestors, who re-arranged rocks and drew their own pictures over cave wall decorations they found after evicting the previous human residents.

Since then, empires have come and gone—from the Persians to the Greeks and the Romans, and lesser kingdoms in between—and the first order of business after conquering a foe was to re-purpose the defeated enemy's palaces and other royal structures for their own use. The victors often used "on site" materials, adding structural and decorative elements to reflect their own identity and culture.

Ariel Aufgang, Aufgang Architects

"Today, economic and political forces gradually reshape modern cities, rather than conquest," said Ariel Aufgang, principal of Aufgang Architects.

"Adaptive reuse of public and commercial buildings in modern society can provide many advantages, such as economic and financial benefits, ecological and environmental protection, and historical and cultural preservation," said Aufgang.

He pointed out that notable examples of adaptive reuse in recent decades include major museums located in repurposed large industrial buildings.



Victoria Theater, Harlem – Manhattan, NY

"The Tate Modern in London is on the site of the old abandoned Bankside Power Station whose immense former turbine hall was converted by the Tate to house large works of art. The DIA Art Foundation Museum, 60 miles north of Manhattan near the Hudson River in Beacon, is located in a former Nabisco factory, built in 1929. Its broad floor spans between supporting columns, and 34,000 s/f of skylights, make it ideal to display large scale contemporary art," he said.

Adaptive reuse is also well suited for commercial applications, Aufgang said, citing "monumental 19th Century bank branches that have been successfully converted to condos and large retail sites in Manhattan and Brooklyn. The Four Seasons Hotel in Istanbul was adapted from an old prison building. Ghirardelli Sq. in San Francisco is considered to be the first major adaptive reuse project in the United States when it opened in 1964. Original architectural design and details have been retained or restored to impart a distinctive character and feel to the resulting projects."

"In New York City several commercial developments featuring re-purposing of historic structures, designed by my firm, are underway or about to start," Aufgang said.

In Harlem, the Corn Exchange Building's rehabilitation preserves the landmarked building's historic façade while adding retail and office space. Built in 1883 at the corner of 125th St. and Park Ave., the Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival style Corn Exchange Building was vacant since the 1970s and fell into severe disrepair. Some of its notable design assets survived, such as terracotta panels with radiant forms, and a date stone with the year 1883 in script, set against a basket-weave pattern. Its redevelopment involves the rehabilitation of the historic building as well as constructing six additional floors, following landmark guidelines. The



\$17 million project will result in 9,000 s/f of retail space and 22,000 s/f of office space.

The Marriott adaptive reuse project, to rise from the site of the Victoria Theater on West 125th St., is significant from the perspectives of Harlem's heritage and its future. Two 26-story towers, Harlem's first world class hotel and a 140-unit rental apartment building that includes affordable housing, will be constructed alongside and above the historic Victoria Theater, whose original 1917 terracotta façade and ornate lobby will be restored to their original appearance.

Corn Exchange Building's renovation plan, Harlem – Manhattan. NY

"Our design preserves and restores historic features of the Victoria Theater, while bringing new amenities, services and cultural facilities to Harlem. For the first time in nearly 100 years the Victoria Theater's terracotta façade and its lobby, with a grand staircase and beautiful ceiling, will be restored to public view and use as part of a new 175-room Marriott Hotel. We have found original plans for the Victoria to guide us in our restoration work. This project will be a major asset in the economic, cultural and historic landscape of Harlem," he said.



The Marriott project includes a 25,000 s/f arts center housing two performance spaces, plus the Classical Theater of Harlem, JazzMobile, the Apollo Theater Foundation, and the Harlem Arts Alliance. There will also be 25,000 s/f of retail space and a 5,000 s/f hotel ballroom. The apartment tower will face 126th St.

Former Brillo factory building, DUMBO - Brooklyn, NY

A landmarked mid 20th century former Brillo factory building in Brooklyn's historic DUMBO district has been re-purposed as a condo with 15 maisonettes featuring private outdoor spaces, soaring ceilings and full laundry rooms in every unit. There are Manhattan views from the upper floors and roof terrace and a rear courtyard for residents' use.

Aufgang said that these projects "are excellent examples of how adaptive reuse can be utilized in large, commercially viable development projects to sustain and enhance the architectural and cultural heritage of New York City's neighborhoods."