

ia architect

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF AIA IOWA

Revisiting the Past: Responding to Existing Conditions



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Clever and charming moments abound throughout the hotel's public spaces. New amenities, like the basement speakeasy—In Confidence—harken back to the hotel's history as home to many of the city's earliest social clubs and at least one newsworthy Prohibition raid of the Log Cabin room.

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For several decades, one of the largest buildings in McGregor, Iowa, has sat largely vacant. The historic three-story structure—referred to as the Masonic Block—stretches along the community's Main Street between the Mississippi River and a limestone bluff.



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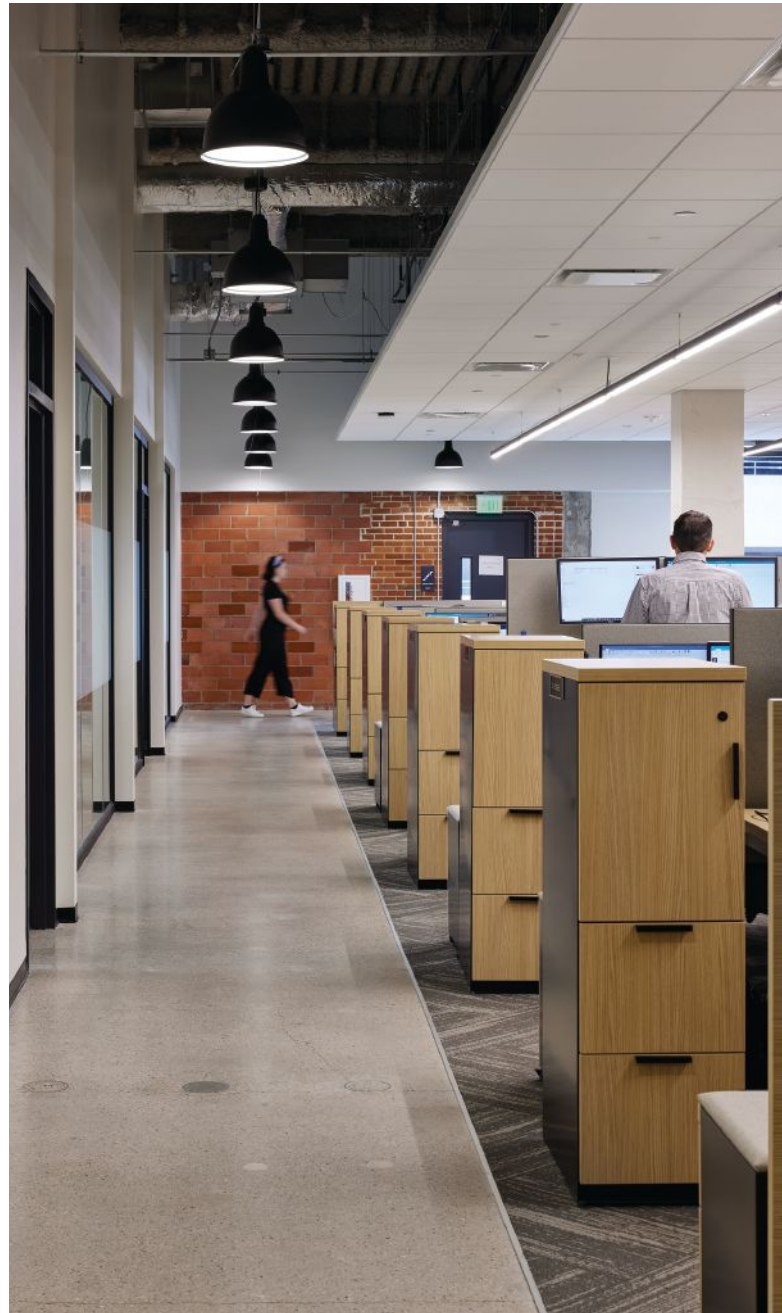
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PRESERVING THE PAST POSITIONING FOR THE FUTURE



Renovation of a mid-century office building at 611 Fifth Avenue in downtown Des Moines for multiple tenants including The Weitz Company's corporate headquarters.

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Editor's letter



Grant Nordby, AIA
Editor, Iowa Architect

Welcome!

Architects grapple with more than just owners' wish lists in a vacuum. We begin with a *place*.

Existing places involve sunk costs—embodied energy and human memories, prior intent stamped into matter. “We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us,” was Churchill’s famous phrase. Context is inescapable: as anchor to memories, counterpoint for improvisation, or point of departure.

In this issue, we revisit the past, exploring restoration, adaptive reuse, and infill projects embodying a range of responses to that which came before.

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 INNOVATIVE PUBLISHING

On March 1, 2024, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) announced that 96 members were elevated to the College of Fellows. These members are spread from coast to coast—some even outside the United States—and represent organizations of varying size and mission. All of these new Fellows, however, share a commitment to excellence and a documented impact on our profession and the discipline of architecture. Iowa’s own Kevin Nordmeyer, FAIA, and Carey Nagle, FAIA, are members of this class of 2024. Over the course of their careers, they have made important contributions to the profession of architecture in our state and region. They are both worthy additions to the College and reveal to the nation the best of Iowa architecture.

Now, you may be asking: “What is Fellowship?” The AIA regards Fellowship as the Institute’s highest membership honor—bestowed on less than 3 percent of members in recognition of a proven national impact on the profession. Fellowship is bestowed in six categories or Objects: Design, Practice, Professional Leadership, Public Service, Alternative Careers, and Education—and is judged by a diverse, seven-member jury. This jury reviews 200 to 300 submissions every year looking for the requisite level of achievement. Kevin was elevated under Object 1: Design, and Carey was elevated under Object 2: Practice. Both join a group of fewer than 4,000 similarly recognized members worldwide.



Kevin Nordmeyer, FAIA

WORDS : PAUL MANKINS, FAIA

I enthusiastically served as Kevin’s sponsor this year in his pursuit of Fellowship. I have known him for more than 30 years and I admire his work. He is one of our state’s strongest design “thinkers,” and his level of design recognition is, frankly, remarkable. In less than three decades, Kevin has received nearly 70 awards for design excellence. Forty-five of these awards were bestowed by the AIA. Included in this impressive list is a National AIA Honor Award for Architecture (2016) for the renovation of the American Republic Insurance Building and Iowa’s first COTE Top Ten Award (2002) for the Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities. In addition, he has been recognized in prestigious awards programs sponsored by *Architectural Record*, *Architect Magazine*, *Faith and Form*, among others. Kevin has continuously crafted a consistent body of highly recognized work—and countless Iowans have benefited.

This award-winning portfolio is more than just beautiful, however—it models an innovative, sustainable approach to practice. Among Kevin’s recognized works is our state’s first LEED Platinum Higher Education Building certified in 2009. The King Pavilion at Iowa State University serves as a real-world illustration of

high-performance, sustainable systems integration for students in the College of Design. The building deploys a number of conservation strategies from daylighting to site water management and includes a conspicuous green roof that students pass by every day. I have been fortunate to teach design studio in this building and know firsthand the influence it has had on a generation of emerging architects. His career reveals three decades of exploration and study into efficient, sustainable, and resilient building practices. Combating climate change is clearly a passion for Kevin—and, thankfully, this passion is contagious.

Increasingly, Kevin’s work explores inclusivity and universal design as well. One of his most recent projects, The Harkin Institute, is a thoughtful, carefully researched investigation into accessibility. Like all his work, it is beautifully composed and welcoming. From the grand accessible circulation ramp that moves visitors up and through the building to the carefully calibrated colors and lighting to assist the visually impaired, the building emphatically states that good design is for everyone. This work serves as the subject for the new book, *ALL: A Guidebook of Strategies for Inclusive Design*, in which Kevin and the team at BNIM share many of

their discoveries—yet another example of his professional generosity and impact.

Augmenting his design work are his efforts leading our profession. Kevin was president of the American Institute of Architects, Iowa Chapter (AIA Iowa), in 2000 and was one of the founders of Iowa's USGBC Chapter. He led the Iowa Energy Center as well, advocating for energy efficiency in the building industry and promoting research into sustainable and resilient construction. In addition, he has been a frequent studio instructor at Iowa State University, where he inspired countless aspiring architecture students. From 2003 to 2008, Kevin was ISU's only studio professor dedicated to sustainable building design. He continues to mentor young designers at BNIM, passing along

his wealth of knowledge. At AIA Iowa, we know these contributions well and awarded him our Medal of Honor in 2017 recognizing his leadership. Simply put, his efforts as a leader, advocate, teacher, and mentor have been tireless. These efforts alone would likely merit Fellowship.

As a former chair of the Fellows Jury, I know firsthand the remarkable things AIA members do nationwide. It is humbling to review these candidates. I also know that some submissions stand out. I suspect Kevin's was one of these special digests. Upon review, the jury was probably left asking: "Why isn't he a Fellow already?" Well, he is now. Please congratulate Kevin Nordmeyer, FAIA, on this remarkable recognition. It is well-deserved and long overdue.



Carey Nagle, FAIA

WORDS : ROB WHITEHEAD, FAIA

Over the last 20 years of his remarkable career, Carey Nagle, FAIA, has made one thing clear: He cares.

This may seem like a requisite qualification for any consummate architect, but our practice can be messy and thwarted by other exigent circumstances. Great architects always do more. They willingly engage in conversations about how to create great work—work that really matters in substantial ways—and how to connect the work to operational and moral positions centered on caring about people and places. Exemplary architects, like Carey, go further. They are great mentors, friends, and collaborators because they see the world through this same lens. They help shape a critical practice around the idea that design excellence demands environmental stewardship and social justice; they share their knowledge and advocacy with others and inspire a better future.

They also make some incredible buildings. Carey's dossier is filled with substantial and influential work that demonstrates the necessary conjunction between buildings that are designed for both experiential qualities and high-performing environmental resilience. His career is filled with a vibrant body of work that reflects his considerate approach to design and collaboration, including publications and award-winning design works that have received recognition at the state, regional, and national levels. Carey's work at BNIM includes a National AIA Honor Award for his remarkable work on the American Enterprise Group Renovation (2015), an AIA COTE Top Ten (2012), and a COTE Top Ten Plus Award (2014) for the LEED Platinum Iowa Utilities Board office. The Stanley Museum of Art in Iowa City

is so beautifully crafted and considered that it has become an instant icon of cultural architecture in the Midwest and a destination for architectural acolytes.

The design work would be worthy of Fellowship on its own merits, but I believe the manner by which this work has been created is worth noting as well. Carey was elevated under the Object of Practice by the Fellows, which requires a demonstrated contribution to the broader impact of how architecture is practiced. In his nomination letter, Tom Leslie, FAIA, praises Carey's contributions in "building a culture at BNIM that balances excellence with support and flexibility ... [which] has changed the culture of the design profession for the better."

Across the country, clients, consultants, and other firms want to work with him and learn from him because he's nurturing, knowledgeable, and has a proven record as a trusted collaborator. Carey is the model for what a contemporary architectural professional should aspire to become; he is modest, kind, inclusive, and accessible—he's both serious and hilarious. He deftly avoids the conflicts and controversies that mar many projects because he focuses on what matters, namely people and the environment. He practices with a resolute dedication to promoting design excellence that elevates those around him to create beautiful, inspiring, and high-performing work. He builds consensus around a caring approach to practice that insists upon the powerful qualities of design, and he practices architecture like a gift that is given to future generations.

Simply put, he has a remarkable way of making things much better.

on the boards

Projects
In Progress



NewBo City Market: Next Level Local

Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Studio Combine

The Next Level Local project expands on a 2013 adaptive reuse of the flooded and blighted Quality Chef plant in Cedar Rapids' New Bohemia neighborhood. Now a cornerstone of the community, NewBo City Market is a nonprofit organization home to unique business start-ups, farmer and artisan markets, and numerous community arts, entertainment, and educational events.

The design expands the Market's capacity by including new types of programs, an optimized layout, and a partial second floor. It relocates the existing community culinary kitchen and adds a local foods grocery as well as additional shopkeeper spaces. The update will increase incubated businesses' success rate, meet the needs of the neighborhood's current food desert, double the Market's impact on the performing arts, and create a dynamic public gathering space.

Construction is slated to start in early 2025.



Dordt University Rozenboom Athletic Center

Sioux Center, Iowa
ISG

Dordt University's DeWitt gymnasium is elevating the player and fan experience. Once features are added and spaces are renovated, this athletics hub will be named the Rozenboom Athletic Center, housing the DeWitt gymnasium. While the gym will accommodate the same number of fans, seats will be reconfigured so fans are closer to the court and immersed in the action. A new hospitality suite, open to the gym from the second floor, will host recruits, donors, and large events.

The original barn-shaped structure will keep its iconic curved roof. The athletic center will feature a broadcasting studio, classrooms, locker rooms, conference rooms, and offices. Other locker rooms, offices, classrooms, training spaces, and the dance studio will be renovated and expanded, aiding recruitment and retention. Branded with the department's mission to lead the Defender way, players, coaches, and fans will feel proud of their teams every day.

Years of Membership

Longstanding AIA Iowa Members Recognized for Commitment to the Chapter

Every year at the Chapter's annual Spring Conference, the American Institute of Architects, Iowa Chapter (AIA Iowa), recognizes licensed members who have shown their longstanding commitment to the Chapter and the profession through years of continuous membership.

Members receive recognition certificates starting at 25 years of membership, followed by 35, and every five years in subsequence. This annual observance is special to AIA Iowa members and inspires others to achieve a similar commitment. 2024 was no different. Chapter leaders

were thrilled to recognize 25 long-term members with Years of Membership certificates and acknowledgement at our virtual Spring Conference on April 5.

Congratulations and thank you to each recipient for their continued membership with the Chapter!

2024 Years of Membership Recipients:

25 Years

William T. Downing, AIA
Stephen L. Emerson, AIA
Kent W. Lutz, AIA
John A. Mahon, AIA
Mark J. Nevenhoven, AIA
James A. Phelps, AIA
Dirk Westercamp, AIA

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Doyle R. Harper, AIA
Ronald L. Mott, AIA
Scott Sankey, AIA
Dane P. Shelton, AIA

40 Years

Jeffrey W. Anderzhon, FAIA
James D. Grundmeier, AIA
Gregory K. Quick, AIA

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Barney A. Bishop, AIA
Robert J. Mathieu, AIA
Kevin W. Monson, AIA
Rodney R. Nelson, AIA
James A. Novak, AIA
Max N. Schmidt, AIA

50 Years

Thomas A. Baldwin, AIA

55 Years

Richard H. Kruse, AIA
William Nowysz, AIA

65 Years

Harold L. Payne, AIA

"As a 45-year member of AIA Iowa, I am keenly aware of the benefits the Chapter provides through its many programs and initiatives. Their ongoing support helped me build my firm and my career."

— KEVIN MONSON, AIA, 2007 AIA IOWA PRESIDENT

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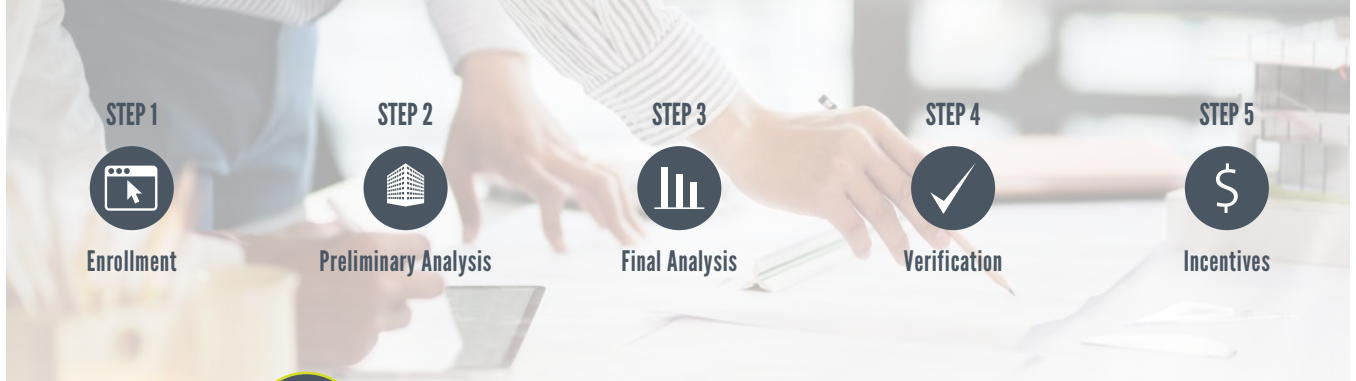
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ASK
STUDIO

A CONSIDERED RESPONSE





PROCESS MAKES PERFECT: POLK COUNTY COURTHOUSE

WORDS: EVAN SHAW, AIA, **IMAGES:** ALEX MICHL, ASSOC. AIA **ARCHITECT:** OPN ARCHITECTS INC.

Top: Constructed from 1900 to 1906 and designed by Proudfoot & Bird, Des Moines' preeminent architects of the time, the Beaux Arts Polk County Courthouse, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, has stood as a downtown icon and served the Fifth Judicial District for 118 years.
Bottom: Each of the six original courtrooms and all the public spaces were restored to their original plaster, scagliola, wood finishes, and paint schemes.



Architects are rightfully thought of as creative people. Mostly that line of thinking orbits around the notion that being creative is limited to creation of the new. However, what most individuals don't realize is that the same creative, outside-the-box, detail-oriented, problem-solving mentality that the best design architects possess is exactly the ideal skill set that is necessary for the successful rehabilitation and restoration of historic structures. Integrating new program and mechanical systems into historic buildings in a way that is sympathetic to the original architecture and detail is, in fact, far more difficult than working with new buildings and requires a well-researched and sophisticated touch such as demonstrated in OPN's recent renovation of the Polk County Courthouse.

Constructed from 1900 to 1906 and designed by Proudfoot & Bird, Des Moines' preeminent architects of the time, the Beaux Arts Polk County Courthouse, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, has stood as a downtown icon and served the Fifth Judicial District for 118 years. When first built, the ornate structure housed all county administration and departments as well as six courtrooms and court functions for Polk County. As the needs of the county grew and changed over time, offices and administration would move to other facilities, and the courthouse would eventually encompass the entire building. By 2014, the historic courthouse was operating with 29 courtrooms shoehorned into every available, if not always suitable or sympathetic, space. In one instance, one of the original historic courtrooms had been subdivided into six separate courtrooms.

This arrangement was no longer serviceable and did not meet the modern requirements for courthouse operations or for today's security and technology needs. Initially, the county looked to construct a single new facility to house all court functions, but after a careful master planning effort and economic analysis, it became clear that the best move for the county, taxpayers, and the urban environment would be to separate the court functions into a campus consisting of both renovated buildings and new construction. Thus, Polk County, with OPN as lead planner and architect, embarked on an ambitious, decade-long-phased plan that began with the adaptive reuse of a disused adjacent department store for the Polk County Justice Center (2016), construction of the new Polk County Criminal Courts (2019), which involved reuse of the concrete structure from the old county jail, and finally the renovation, restoration, and transformation of the original historic courthouse into the new Civil Courts facility.

Before even embarking on the design for the renovations of the historic courthouse, OPN realized that any design strategy would require a careful understanding of all historic elements and spaces. Not just what and where they are, but why they are important, how they are constructed, what is their condition, and what should

By 2014, the historic courthouse was operating with 29 courtrooms shoehorned into every available, if not always suitable or sympathetic, space. Thus, Polk County, with OPN as lead planner and architect, embarked on an ambitious, decade-long-phased plan that began with the adaptive reuse of a disused adjacent department store for the Polk County Justice Center (2016), construction of the new Polk County Criminal Courts (2019), which involved reuse of the concrete structure from the old county jail, and finally the renovation, restoration, and transformation of the original historic courthouse into the new Civil Courts facility.





the strategy be to address each element. To do this, the architects spent eight months in a pure discovery process: researching, investigating, and documenting all aspects of the building and deciding what treatments would be appropriate for each component. This involved careful analysis of the original construction drawings to understand the original design intent and comparing them to what was observable; investigation into potential pathways for mechanical, electrical, and technology systems and determining the routing strategy so there would be no interference with the historical character of the spaces; and some selective demolition of more recent renovations so that it could be determined if surviving historical features were underneath. Research into rare and unique materials was also conducted, such as how to restore scagliola, which is a special marble-like plaster finishing technique that required a specialized restoration craftsman to be flown in from the East Coast. This research ultimately coalesced into a single reference document that the design team and contractor could consult throughout design and construction.

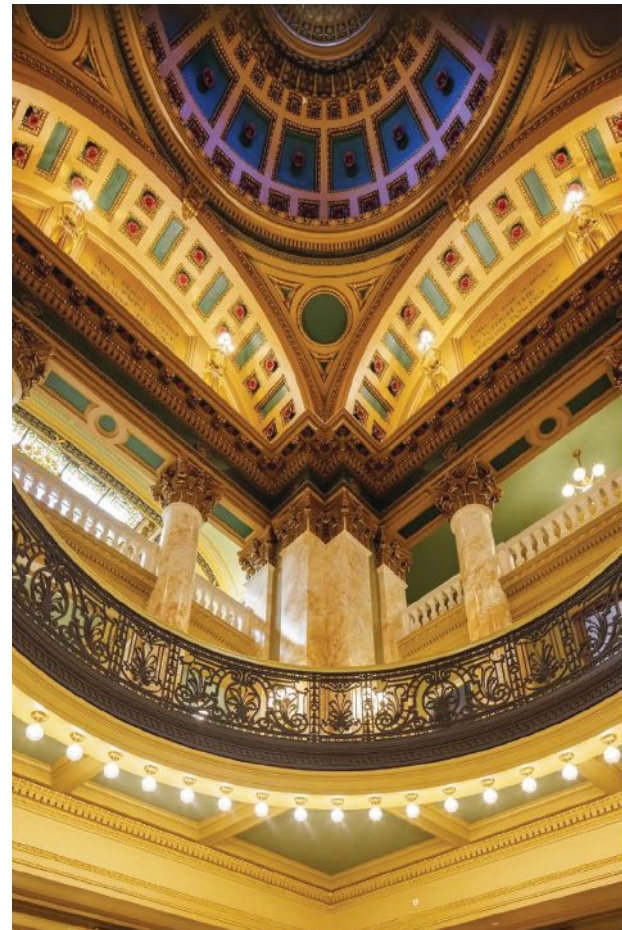
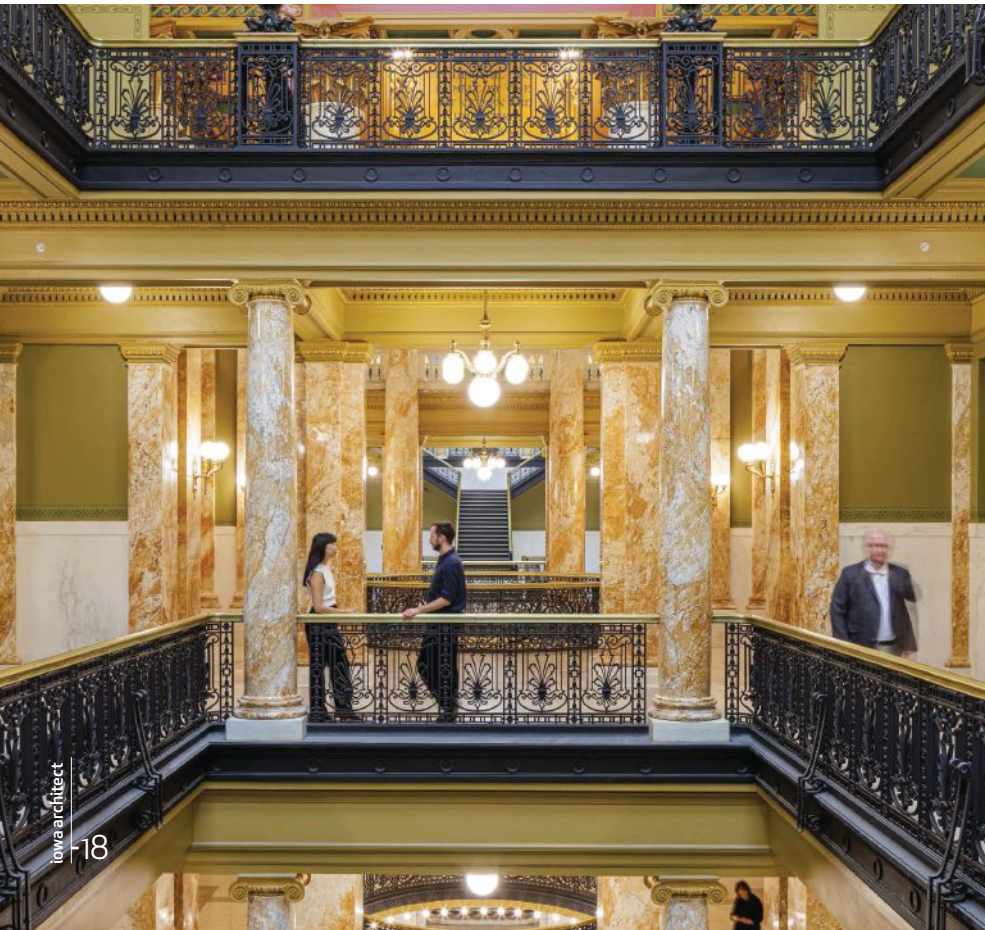
With this exhaustive research in hand, the architects set forth to plan a renovation that would be as sympathetic to the original historical character as possible and seamlessly integrate modern mechanical, technology, and security functionality to bring the building up to the standard of a 21st-century courthouse. Dropped ceilings were removed from all historic spaces, exposing for the first time in decades the lavish vaulted plaster ceilings. Each of the six original courtrooms and all the public spaces were restored to their

original plaster, scagliola, wood finishes, and paint schemes. Most of the historic furniture that was salvageable was fully restored, including the judge's benches. Modern utilities were carefully routed to be hidden, and any newly crafted rooms or spaces were designed to be as sympathetic to the original ornate architecture as possible, such as glass-encased meeting rooms outside the courtrooms. These rooms provide much-needed functionality for private conversations yet do not detract from the original historic experience of the building.

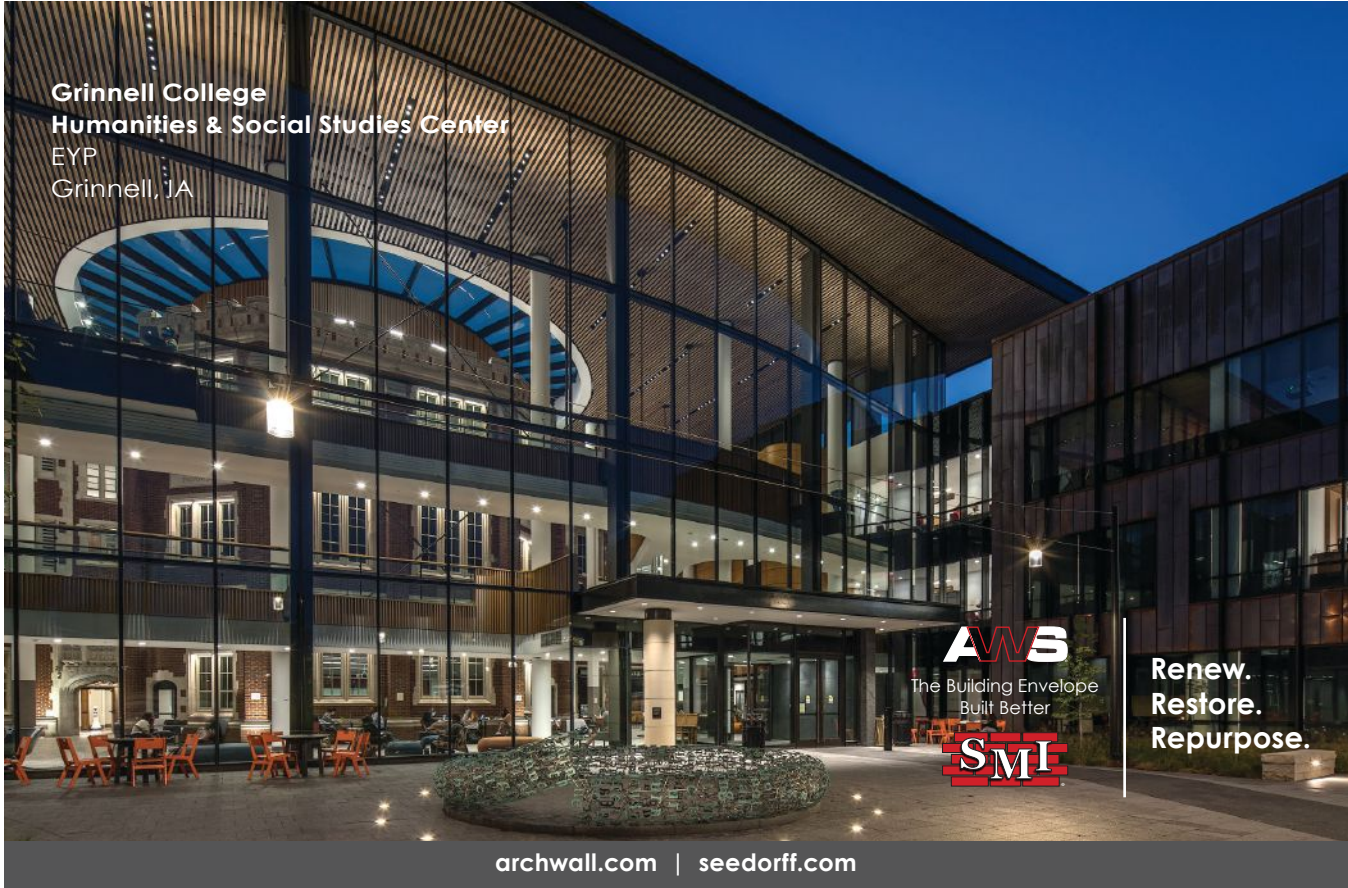
Energy efficiency and sustainability were also strong considerations of the renovation plan. From the project's outset, the design team set an ambitious goal of achieving an 80 percent carbon reduction and 70 percent reduction in energy consumption. All lighting was replaced with LED fixtures, and original historic fixtures were restored and retrofitted with LED components. A shared boiler with the Criminal Courts building combined with a new hydronic HVAC system to reduce the footprint and space needed for mechanical systems and increase energy efficiency were installed. Rooftop solar panels were also planned for, although the actual installation will happen at a later date.

The result of all this research and creative effort is a completely functional building ready to serve the citizens of Polk County for another 100 years, yet one that retains and celebrates all its historic character to such an extent that it appears as if it was always so. Which is perhaps the highest compliment that can be paid to a restoration project.

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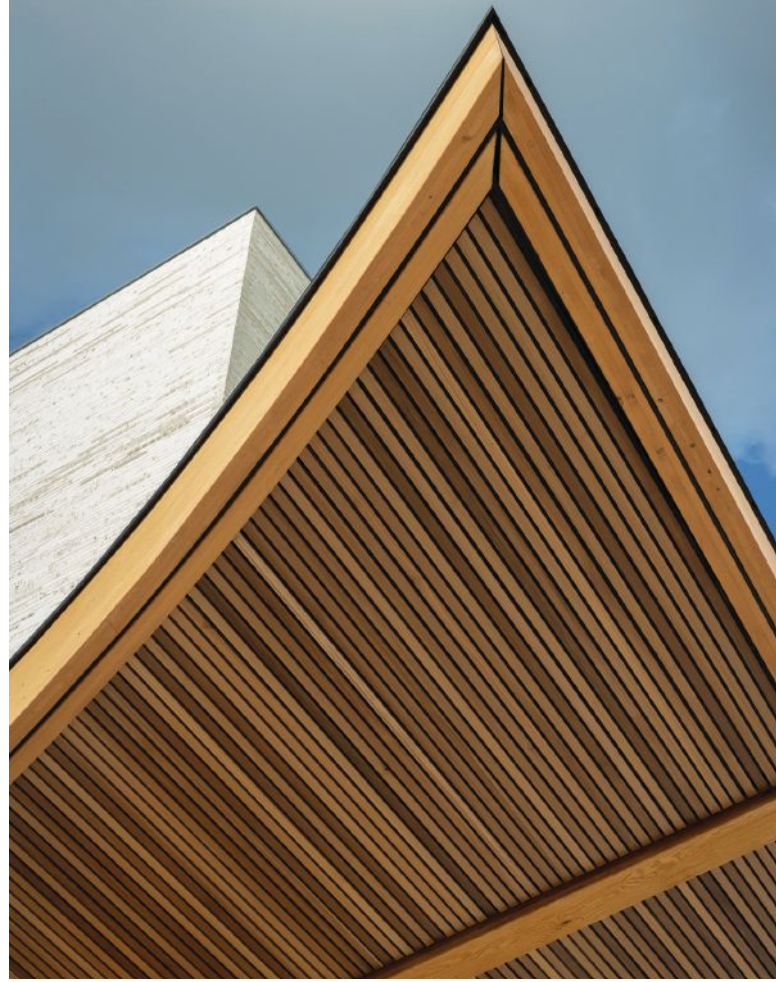




NORWEGIAN WOOD

Snøhetta and BNIM Help Decorah and Its Signature Cultural Institution Grow Together

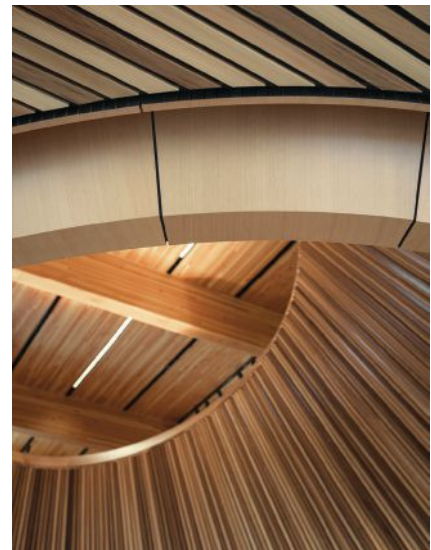
WORDS: THOMAS LESLIE, FAIA **IMAGES:** MICHAEL GRIMM **DESIGN ARCHITECT:** SNØHETTA **ARCHITECT OF RECORD:** BNIM



Vesterheim’s expansion in Decorah blurs the lines between local, regional, and international, as well as between infill, adaptive reuse, and new construction. Working with materials sourced nearby but responding to a cultural heritage that goes back generations, Snøhetta and BNIM forged a civic identity from a new streetscape, an expanded park, and an interlocking set of interior spaces that house the institution’s divergent needs.

Iowa’s Driftless region is the exception to the state’s topography. Its hilly terrain and steep valleys formed a landscape geologically familiar to Norwegian immigrants in the late 19th century, who carved out space for livestock and produced farms from its karst topography. That heritage forms a rich collection of sites and museums in northeast Iowa and southwest Wisconsin. Decorah’s Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum has long been a central stop on this popular

Left: Working with materials sourced nearby but responding to a cultural heritage that goes back generations, Snøhetta and BNIM forged a civic identity from a new streetscape, an expanded park, and an interlocking set of interior spaces that house the institution’s divergent needs. **Top right:** The building’s extraordinary canopy, which cantilevers a dozen feet over the sidewalk, is an exposed, polished wood structure that provides functional shade for waiting tour groups. **Bottom right:** The completed building had to compete with the memory of the historic one, and throughout, Snøhetta’s design and the extraordinary craft of the execution make the case for new construction that recalls the texture and articulation of a vanished building rather than parroting its forms or details.



The material palette of the new structure makes tactile references to the blended heritage of Norway and Driftless Iowa. Wood, brick, and limestone are parsed throughout in carefully choreographed visual and spatial experiences that impress without overwhelming the artifacts on display.

tourist itinerary, and it is the premier cultural institution documenting the experience and history of this ethnic group. Founded in 1877 and partnered for nearly a century with nearby Luther College, the museum moved into the renovated Arlington Hotel on Decorah's main downtown avenue in 1933. It has been independent since the late 1960s, when it established a Folk Art School that continues teaching Norwegian crafts, music, and language. It has also served as the center for a dozen nearby buildings—some relocated from their original sites—reflecting the immigrant experience.

Growing interest in heritage and genealogy has boosted interest and attendance at Vesterheim over the last generation, and the museum gradually expanded, locating its Folk Art School in an early 20th-century building at the other end of the block. A new Heritage Park adjacent to the site is connected to some of the historic structures that the museum incorporates. However, the museum also foresaw a larger building and—crucially—the demolition of neighboring, more recent buildings that cut the park off from Water Street. Snøhetta, a firm with Norwegian roots but an international presence since their critically

acclaimed Oslo Opera House opened in 2008, partnered with BNIM to address the intricately related needs of the museum and the civic desires of Decorah.

One existing building on Water Street, a few doors down the block from the Arlington Hotel building, had been damaged by fire and presented an immediate problem; while historic, its condition and scale presented intractable planning issues. In consultation with Decorah's Historic Preservation Commission and other city leaders, the design team and the museum made the case for replacing it with a new structure that would better support the goal of a coherent campus. This broader vision came with a high bar for design and material quality; the completed building had to compete with the memory of the historic one, and throughout, Snøhetta's design and the extraordinary craft of the execution make the case for new construction that recalls the texture and articulation of a vanished building rather than parroting its forms or details.

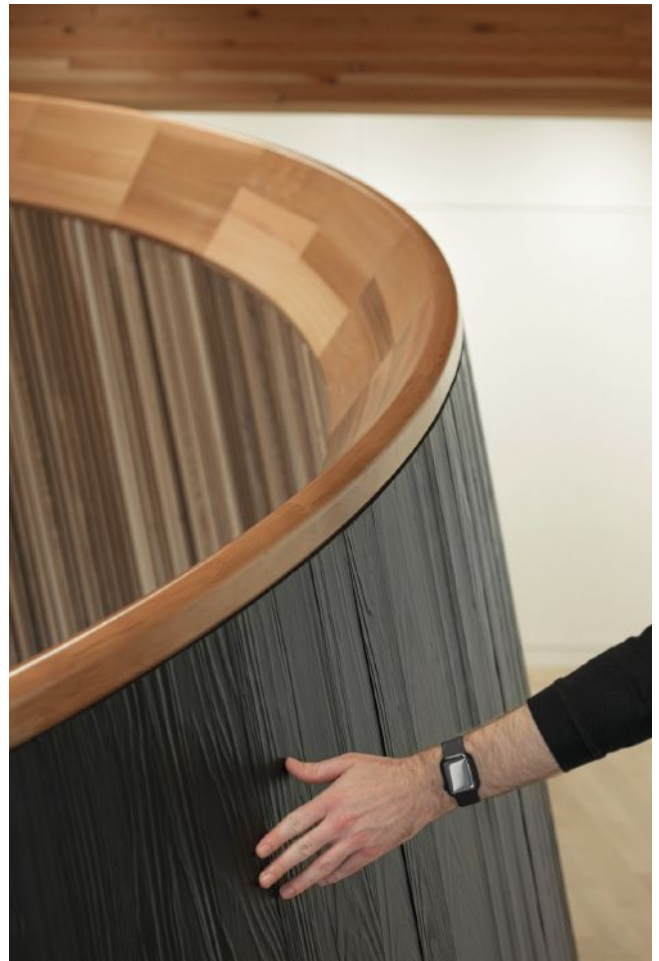
The material palette of the new structure makes tactile references to the blended heritage of Norway and Driftless Iowa. Wood, brick, and limestone are parsed throughout

in carefully choreographed visual and spatial experiences that impress without overwhelming the artifacts on display. This begins with the building's extraordinary canopy, which cantilevers a dozen feet over the sidewalk. This exposed, refined wood structure provides functional shade for waiting tour groups. It also alludes to town and heritage, recalling a theater marquee in its basic form and Norwegian boat building in its taut curves and intricately scaled, narrowly paneled soffits. Once inside, visitors see, touch, and, through their footfalls, hear timber as a finish and structural material throughout. "We compared steel and mass timber structures," BNIM's project director, Jonathan Ramsey, AIA, recalls, "and Vesterheim supported the idea of a low embodied carbon building that maximized the use of wood." Sourcing mass timber from a nearby producer in Albert Lea, Minnesota, meant saving fuel and cost, but equally important was the idea, championed by Vesterheim, that the building would reflect its region in both materials and labor.

Similarly, the exterior brick was sourced from Adel, Iowa, an intentionally rough type that came in extended 24-inch lengths. Snøhetta's designers were particularly taken with its buff color and varied textures and colors, allowing that even bricks that broke in transit be incorporated into the exterior wall. The result is a finely textured facade that is precise in its geometry but invitingly coarse up close.

Combining precision and tactility on the interior, the design team incorporated an existing, rough limestone and brick party wall (which provides a transition from the new structure to the Folk Art School rooms) and exposed concrete shear walls necessary for the timber structure's lateral stability. These are all set against the finely detailed surfaces of the timber itself, carefully delineated gallery walls, and minimally framed windows and storefronts. Wood and glass frame the museum's displays in a similar palette of finely honed but texturally rich wood and glass, while the focal point of this material sonata is the conical oculus that connects the ground and upper floor in the main entry hall. Here, charred timber around the oculus contrasts with narrow slats on its interior that help to diffuse sound through the space during performances in the lobby. On top, one of the building's tactile signatures is a wood cap, polished smooth, that invites the hand through its shape and surface. "It's really nice to just run your hands along," says Ramsey, "and then you find yourself looking over the edge," visually connecting to the level below.

Such small, resonant moments reflect the quest for authenticity that fuels much of the heritage tourism that has made Decorah a destination. The craft of Iowa woodworkers, or bricklayers, feels like a productively resistant approach to the commodity building that saturates much of our daily lives. Running our hands along a well-made, thoughtfully designed piece of wood connects us with materials, analogous to seeing ancestors' handiwork in one of the museum's rosemaling pieces. Constructing anew in a historical context and responding to the clear responsibility to enhance a downtown block, despite the need to erase a piece, feels like an extension of this appreciation. And the collaboration between firms with roots in the Midwest and Norway echoed this. It was "a true collaboration," in Ramsey's words. Like pieces by Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg that combined folk songs with classical and modern themes, the new Vesterheim balances local and global, looking ahead while building on its rich past.

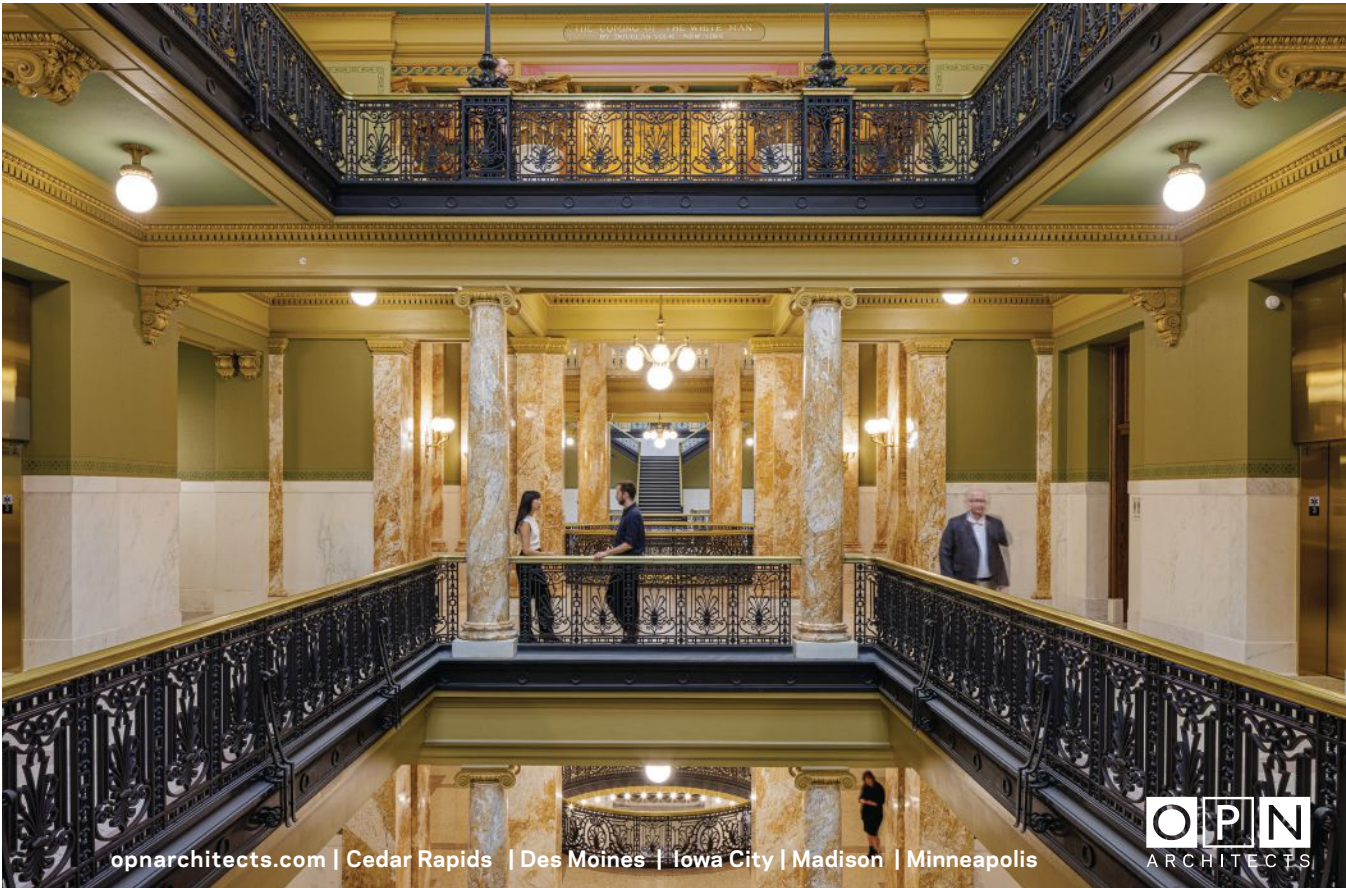


Charred timber around the conical oculus, which connects the ground and upper floor in the main entry hall, contrasts with narrow slats on its interior that help to diffuse sound through the space during performances in the lobby. On top, one of the building's tactile signatures is a wood cap, polished smooth, that invites the hand through its shape and surface.



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HOTEL FORT DES MOINES: THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

WORDS : STEVE KING, AIA IMAGES : CAMERON CAMPBELL, AIA, INTEGRATED STUDIO ARCHITECT : INVISION



When Raj Patel of Iowa City-based Hawkeye Hotels committed to an ambitious plan to reopen the shuttered Hotel Fort Des Moines in 2014, he selected INVISION for the design. Rehabilitation of the significant building followed the Secretary of Interior’s Guidelines for Historic Preservation to be eligible for both state and federal historic tax credits.

Listed on the National Register in 1982, the hotel’s original architects—Proudfoot, Bird, and Rawson—utilized a classical base-column-capital tripartite organization for the 11-story exterior. The predominant street-level feature of the primary facade was an arcade of five semi-circular arches set into gray granite and limestone veneer. Historically, the windows of this grand arcade flooded the interior two-story public lobby with light and views to the street beyond. Since 1962, the light and views have been cut off by spandrel glass added when the lobby was filled in to create more event space on the second floor. As a continuously operating hotel, alterations were apparent throughout the hotel’s interior. Fortunately, the grand stairway and walnut surround of the three elevator openings remained.

Patel called the decision to restore the two-story lobby a “no-brainer,” but that belies the courageous choice to value the light, volume, and rich material on display in the restored space. It would have been a much simpler and lower-cost

decision to leave things as they were found. True to that vision, INVISION partner and project designer, Mike Bechtel, AIA, made an inspired choice to reinterpret the blueprints of the lost, elaborately plastered ceiling of the original lobby to create a deeply coffered ceiling of simple geometric shapes that recalls but does not imitate the original. The bright white ceiling floats above the dark and richly detailed walnut woodwork that rings the space.

On the upper guest room floors, the rehabilitation plan maintained the existing corridor walls and the historic door locations while reincorporating the perimeter marble tile and base. The guest experience is improved with larger, well-appointed rooms featuring historic images and dates honoring both the hotel’s celebrated guestlist and the staff responsible for day-to-day operations.

Clever and charming moments abound throughout the hotel’s public spaces. New amenities, like the basement speakeasy—In Confidence—harken back to the hotel’s history as home to many of the city’s earliest social clubs and at least one newsworthy Prohibition raid of the Log Cabin room. The hotel restaurant name-checks the original architects, a notable and prolific 19th-century architecture firm responsible for the design of more than 650 buildings constructed around central Iowa.



When the Hotel Fort Des Moines first opened for business in 1919, the Great War was wrapping up and the Great Influenza epidemic was entering its second and final year. Americans' impulse to move freely about the country was quickly becoming motorized through the growing availability of factory-produced automobiles, and Iowa's population just happened to be first in the nation per capita in automobile ownership. It might not seem the most opportune time for the original hotel founders, businessmen with names still easily recognized in Des Moines today, to determine that what the city really needed was a great hotel for business travelers located far from the railway station on the western edge of downtown, but that's exactly what they did.

Since its founding, there had only been five management groups or families responsible for the hotel's legacy. The Hotel Fort Des Moines shone as the host to luminaries and celebrities

from around the world. The guest list includes 13 U.S. presidents, foreign leaders, actors, musicians, and athletes. If the rooms could talk, they might reveal how much Nikita Khrushchev liked bacon for breakfast, why Cher brought her own mattress (and left it there), or how Ozzy Osbourne felt after his notorious encounter with a bat at Vet's Auditorium in 1982.

Over time, the hotel's luster began to dim. Prior to the acquisition by Hawkeye Hotels, an earlier rehabilitation had stalled-out when financing fell apart because of the Great Recession. Construction started on the new project in 2018 with an anticipated reopening in the second quarter of 2020—just in time for the outbreak of COVID-19. This delayed reopening for another agonizing year. History seemed to be repeating itself, but today the light and luster of the Hotel Fort Des Moines seem to shine even brighter for it.

Opening page: Listed on the National Register in 1982, the hotel's original architects—Proudfoot, Bird, and Rawson—utilized a classical base-column-capital tripartite organization for the 11-story exterior. The predominant street-level feature of the primary facade was an arcade of five semi-circular arches set into gray granite and limestone veneer. **Opposite and above:** Mike Bechtel, AIA, of INVISION made an inspired choice to reinterpret the blueprints of the lost, elaborately plastered ceiling of the original lobby to create a deeply coffered ceiling of simple geometric shapes that recalls but does not imitate the original. The bright white ceiling floats above the dark and richly detailed walnut woodwork that rings the space.



GOOD BONES: LINCOLN SAVINGS BANK

WORDS : GRANT NORDBY, AIA **IMAGES :** CAMERON CAMPBELL, AIA, INTEGRATED STUDIO **ARCHITECT :** INVISION

When Lincoln Savings Bank staff first toured the abandoned warehouse that would later house their new headquarters, “some eyebrows raised,” says INVISION partner-in-charge Brad Leeper, AIA. “The floors were used for storage and were littered with children’s backyard swimming pools used to catch the many, many leaks in the roof.” Fortunately, tours of a nearby INVISION hotel restoration lent confidence that a similar transformation was possible here. Such trust was important, as the project would only pencil out financially if state and federal historic preservation incentives were awarded upon completion.

Raising the stakes further, “Lincoln Savings Bank had never had a central headquarters,” explains project design lead Mike Bechtel, AIA. Staff struggled to coordinate from scattered branch banks, leading to the decision to centralize operations in Waterloo. A lengthy search for a suitable location commenced,

culminating in the courageous decision to retrofit the top two floors of the former warehouse.

The building—one of several long-abandoned industrial structures in the area—offered a mixture of challenges and opportunities. The 100-foot-by-260-foot top floor included a boarded-over spine of skylights that once augmented daylight and ventilation from perimeter windows. Massive concrete mushroom columns were meant to support tremendously heavy loads. Now that they would bear just 300 pounds per square foot, Bechtel recounts, the structural engineer “basically just stopped calculating past a certain point.”

Given that “character-defining” exterior walls and ceilings were largely untouchable, designers had to find alternate routes for mechanical and electrical equipment. This led to a raised-floor system atop the floor slab—deep enough for ductwork on

Top left, center, and right: Windows and skylight glazing are new, as is the dowel-laminated timber slab stair connecting the new atrium. Risers are steel, bolted to the timber slab. Steel rods suspend stair and landing from above. Railing is glass. **Opposite, bottom right:** The 100-foot-by-260-foot top floor of the original structure, an abandoned warehouse, included a boarded-over spine of skylights that once augmented daylight and ventilation from perimeter windows.



the lower floor, but only 6 inches for wiring serving the shallow upper floor, which bumped against the 75-foot high-rise limit. At that level, spiral duct, sprinkler piping, and light fixtures were carefully routed through a spider's web of existing steel roof framing. These flexible systems enable future reconfigurability. "They knew they were going to grow but couldn't predict exactly how much or in which department," says Bechtel.

One major modification to existing conditions: a long, crenelated slot cut in the floor slab below the central skylight. This gave lower-floor occupants ready access to daylight and to colleagues above. Negotiations with state preservationists for a larger daylight atrium led to an outcome better than might have been planned from scratch. The new opening zigzags around original mushroom columns, creating prominent "lily pad" outlook points reminiscent of Wright's Johnson Wax building.

Office and conferencing insertions touch down lightly, warming the "cool" space visually, thermally, and acoustically with micro-perforated oak and felt panels. Windows and skylight glazing are new, as is the dowel-laminated timber slab stair connecting the new atrium. Risers are steel, bolted to the timber slab. Steel rods suspend stair and landing from above. Railing is glass. Asked about materials and the choice to retrofit, Bechtel observes: "We didn't pour any new concrete. One of the things that I love about working in existing buildings is the opportunity to breathe new life into something that's tired and that has a lot of embodied carbon in it."

The result is greater than the sum of its parts. Strategic insertions and deletions justify and elevate the formerly obsolete structure through a dialogue of old and new.

Top left: Lincoln Savings Bank had never had a central headquarters, and staff struggled to coordinate from scattered branch banks, leading to the decision to centralize operations in Waterloo. A lengthy search for a suitable location commenced, culminating in the courageous decision to retrofit the top two floors of the former warehouse. **Bottom left and right:** The new opening zigzags around original mushroom columns, creating prominent "lily pad" outlook points reminiscent of Wright's Johnson Wax building.



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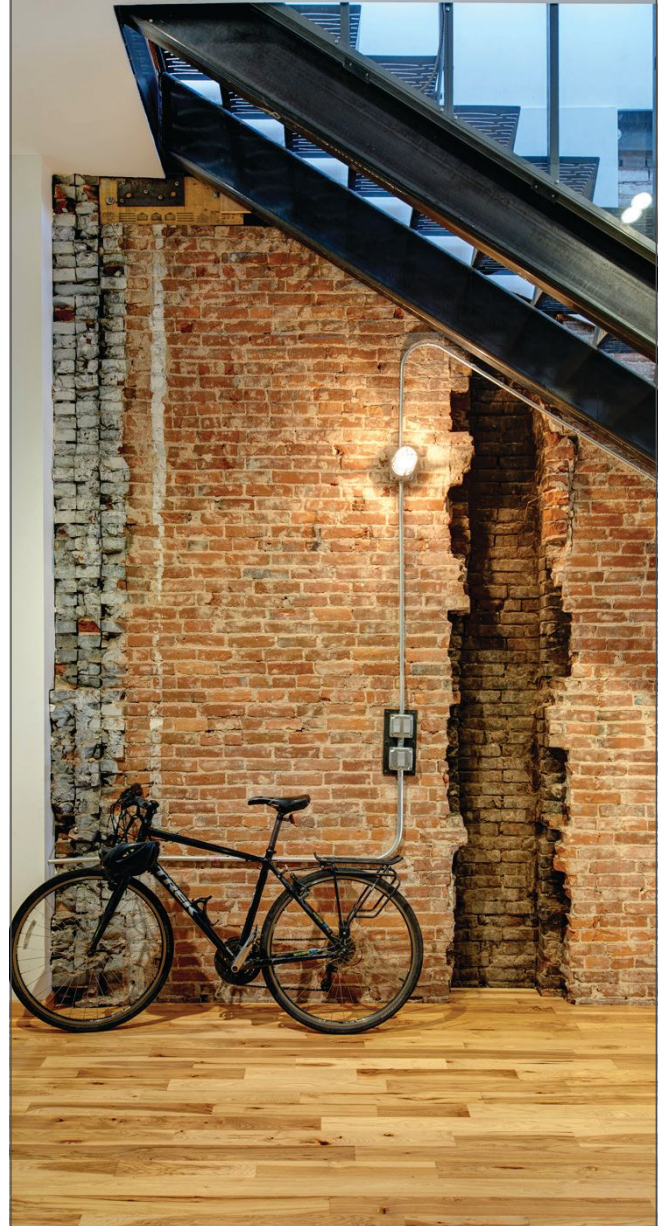
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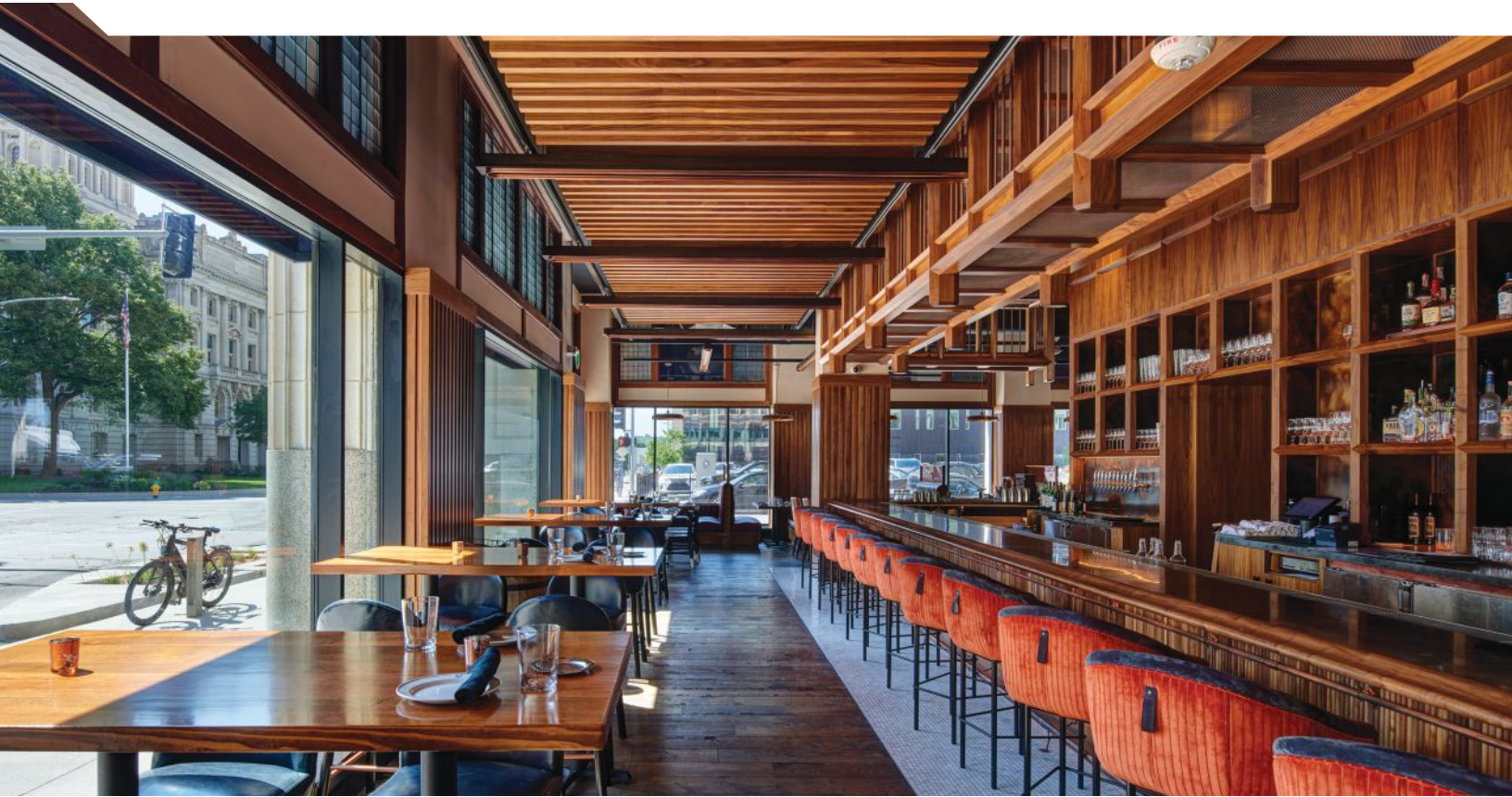


LIFE CYCLE RECYCLE

THE SURETY HOTEL:

PRESERVING AND CREATING A SOCIAL AMENITY

WORDS : JESSICA SEARS IMAGES : CAMERON CAMPBELL, AIA, INTEGRATED STUDIO ARCHITECT : SLINGSHOT ARCHITECTURE INTERIOR DESIGN : DLR GROUP



In 1913, the Hippee Building in Des Moines was a bustling business hub, with Iowa Loan & Trust Company anchoring the main level and eight upper floors of office space, making it the tallest building in Iowa. The passing decades have seen the building transform repeatedly in use and in name. Now a historic landmark, the restored building has a new name—the Surety Hotel.

Slingshot Architecture and DLR Group collaborated to create a building that functions as a community events center as well as hotel. Those entering the main doors are greeted by the former bank space, which previously spanned from the front to the back of the building. Now, the one-story rear half of this area functions as the ballroom. A row of columns once supported and divided this space, but the client asked that these be removed. “Most of the columns are holding up a nine-story building, but at the very back, it was just a one-story portion of the building. ... We had to put structure above the building and then hang the room from that structure in order to remove the columns that were in the back,” says David Voss, AIA, Slingshot Architecture principal and lead designer. The National Park Service expected visible restored portions of the former bank to appear cohesive, so the design team added a new glass partition to distinguish restored spaces from this retrofitted space while still allowing occupants views from one to the other.

DLR Group was instrumental in designing the ground-floor restaurant, with a vision of “history meets sophistication.” Intricately detailed millwork and upholstered chairs and booths create a rich experience for patrons. A Milwaukee millworker hand-crafted colorful patterns on a fired metal hood above the cook line. The design enhances the intimacy at the bar—custom light fixtures throughout the narrow space promote the vintage look of the building but with a modern take. As a nod to the bank upholstery of the past, each furniture piece has tufting details. The final touch is a bejeweled raccoon that hangs from the wall above the host stand as a nod to a former building employee who owned a pet raccoon and would often bring it to work.

A technical hurdle arose while making upper floors code-compliant with their new use. The original building contained just one open staircase connecting all nine stories. Code now requires two protected means of egress from each floor—typically via enclosed staircases, and open stairs may not connect more than two floors. This stair features intricate cast iron with white marble treads and wainscot on the walls. The goal was to not enclose the staircase for historic reasons, so the team introduced a clear glass drop curtain on the second floor to maintain pressure balance for the new smoke evacuation system—preserving the architecture while protecting life safety.

Upper-story floors are a mixture of tile and maple (historic dentists’ offices required tile floors). These were preserved, providing a unique experience for hotel guests. A botched 1970s remodel had replaced the building’s 138 window openings with



In 1913, the Hippee Building in Des Moines was a bustling business hub, with Iowa Loan & Trust Company anchoring the main level and eight upper floors of office space, making it the tallest building in Iowa.

smaller windows. This project restored the size and appearance of the originals. Original terra-cotta detailing can be found throughout the base and capital of the exterior elevation. Some had to be replaced, like for like, but most of this detailing had remained intact over the years.

An addition of the Solarium, a pre-function space, connects the courtyard to the ballroom. Defined by masonry walls and string lights, the courtyard provides casual outdoor areas for events or dining. Dubbed “a Midwestern renaissance,” the building bustles once again with restored life.

Opposite, top left: DLR Group was instrumental in designing the ground-floor restaurant, with a vision of “history meets sophistication.” Intricately detailed millwork and upholstered chairs and booths create a rich experience for patrons. **Opposite, bottom left:** The National Park Service expected visible restored portions of the former bank to appear cohesive, so the design team added a new glass partition to distinguish restored spaces from this retrofitted space while still allowing occupants views from one to the other. **Opposite, bottom right:** Defined by masonry walls and string lights, the courtyard provides casual outdoor areas for events or dining.

MASONIC BLOCK: THE LATEST LAYER

WORDS : NATHAN KALAHER, AIA IMAGES : MA ARCHITECTURE ARCHITECT : MA ARCHITECTURE

For several decades, one of the largest buildings in McGregor, Iowa, has sat largely vacant. The historic three-story structure—referred to as the Masonic Block—stretches along the community’s Main Street between the Mississippi River and a limestone bluff.

The designer/developer team utilized historic tax credits to make the project a success financially but also used preservation as a design tool for this project. It was key for the team that new interventions not detract from the historic elements that made this project so endearing to the design team and the local community to begin with.

Working on historic structures often leads to discoveries that need to be dealt with on the fly; this team was built for such a scenario. “With the architects, owners, and developers as a part of the same team, we were able to evaluate options, troubleshoot problems, and make decisions quickly. We were

all responding to the same set of information and were able to discuss it face to face,” shares architect Jessica Terrill, AIA.

Like many adaptive reuse projects, this building presented unique opportunities, challenges, and discoveries. Developer Matt Aust says, “The natural environment surrounding the project was equally appealing with views of the Mississippi River in the front of the building and massive limestone bluffs in the back of it.” The large windows with views to the Mississippi River were an opportunity for commercial and residential tenants alike, while the back of the building sits nestled adjacent to a stone bluff creating a more private and unique experience. During restoration of the exterior, a non-historic, lean-to structure at the back side was removed. Unfortunately, a large portion of the original masonry wall fell down in the process, which then needed to be painstakingly reconstructed. However, positive discoveries such as a former

Below: The large windows with views to the Mississippi River were an opportunity for commercial and residential tenants alike, while the back of the building sits nestled adjacent to a stone bluff creating a more private and unique experience.



ice-chilling tunnel carved into the hillside are now viewed as uniquely cool features of the site.

The design team needed to provide modern interventions to make the building usable for years to come, but at the same time these needed to coexist within the historic structure. For example, “locating the new elevator in a location that worked with the unit distribution and didn’t destroy any of the valuable historic material that remained was not only challenging but critical to the design,” shares architect Mindy Aust, AIA.

Subtlety in this project becomes a guiding principle for the design team. The original part of the historic building consisted of four bays. These are divided into two properties today, one with three bays and the other just one. The designers developed a new parti that kept the original structural bays in mind, with the first two floors preserved in their original three-bay configuration, while the third floor utilizes a two-thirds and one-thirds concept. The third floor historically housed a Masonic meeting space, which held a smaller meeting space within it for the Independent Order of the Odd Fellows. This was discovered painted in its traditional pink color. The pink walls remain today within a studio apartment. The project’s design is about conversing rather than contrasting with historic remnants. In this way, the new improvements become just the latest layer in the palimpsest of changes through time.

At right and bottom right: The historic three-story structure stretches along the community’s Main Street between the Mississippi River and a limestone bluff. **Bottom left:** It was key for the team that new interventions not detract from the historic elements that made this project so endearing to the design team and the local community to begin with.



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-Alyanna Subayno, Assoc. AIA

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project credits

Polk County Historic Courthouse

Architect: OPN Architects Inc.
Location: Des Moines, Iowa
Photographer: Alex Michl, Assoc. AIA

Vesterheim Commons

Design Architect: Snøhetta
Architect of Record: BNIM
Location: Decorah, Iowa
Acoustical Consultant: Arup
Civil Engineer: Erdman Engineering
Code Consulting: FP&C
Contractor: McGough Construction
Landscape Architect: Snøhetta
Lighting Designer: Morrissey Engineering Inc.
MEPT Engineer: Morrissey Engineering Inc.
Photographer: Michael Grimm
Signage Design: Snøhetta
Structural Engineers: Meyer Borgman Johnson; Fast & Epp
Sustainability Consulting: Atelier Ten

Hotel Fort Des Moines

Architect: INVISION
Location: Des Moines, Iowa
Contractor: Baxter Construction Co.
Electrical Engineer: Van Maanen Electric
Mechanical Engineer: Brockway Mechanical
Photographer: Cameron Campbell, AIA, Integrated Studio
Structural Engineer: KPFF

Lincoln Savings Bank

Architect: INVISION
Location: Waterloo, Iowa
Civil Engineer: Ament Design
Photographer: Cameron Campbell, AIA, Integrated Studio
Structural Engineer: Raker Rhodes

Surety Hotel

Architect: Slingshot Architecture
Location: Des Moines, Iowa
Civil Engineer: ERG
Contractor: Walsh Construction
Interior Design: DLR Group
Landscape Architecture: Genus Landscape Architects
Lighting Design: MRD Lighting
MEP Engineers: Modus Engineering
Photographer: Cameron Campbell, AIA, Integrated Studios

Masonic Block

Architect: MA Architecture
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