Best of 2005

U.S. Post Office and Courthouse - Cadman Plaza

Award of Merit Adaptive Reuse

For more than 40 years, much of the castle-like U.S. Post Office and Courthouse in downtown Brooklyn - with its comer tower, turrets, dormers, and arches - stood mostly empty and neglected. Now a $175 million adaptive-reuse project, completed in August, has restored the landmark to its former glory.

The original four-story Romanesque revival-style building,. completed in 1892, long housed facilities for the federal courts and post office. An eight-story addition completed in 1933 significantly expanded the structure. But the building was never fully occupied, and some parts have been vacant since 1960.

The project team had the task of further expanding the existing 575,000-sq.-ft. structure to provide new facilities for the U.S. Bankruptcy Court, U.S. Attorney, and U.S. Postal Service, each of which had different access and security needs. And the team had to restore the original structure, which looks over Cadman Plaza.

"The design and construction issues were complex, requiring a great deal of expertise in historic and adaptive reuse," said one juror.

The team added more than 85,000 sq. ft. of new space into the 1933 addition, including a 41,840-sq.-ft. mezzanine between the first and second floors and 9,300 sq. ft. carved into each of the four upper floors. It built the space into a portion of an interior courtyard.

In order to accommodate the expansion, the project team tested existing materials, such as the cast-iron frame, to determine whether it could be welded to a new steel frame. The tests failed, requiring the team to instead bolt new girders and beams into place.

The team also had to keep the 24-hour, seven-day-per-week postal operation functioning during the project, which required extensive protective measures to ensure customer and employee safety.

The team had to address years of neglect and an aging infrastructure in restoring the building's historic features. A survey found that most of the elements could be restored, with the notable exception of the plasterwork. The team's subsequent replacement of the original plaster and moldings was one of the largest projects of its kind in the city.

Specialty contractors restored and refurbished many remaining historic details, including marble, mantles, and original woodwork, and they also replicated missing or damaged elements. In addition, the team recreated the 1892 color scheme >>

Key Players

Owner: U.S. General Services Administration

Construction Manager-General Contractor: Bovis Lend Lease

Architect: R. M. Kliment & Francis Halsband Architects

M-E-P, FP Engineer: Flack + Kurtz

Structural Engineer: Severud Associates

Lighting Design: H. M. Brandston & Partners

Landscape Design: Johansson & Walcavage

Electrical Contractor: Five Star Electric

Plumbing Contractor: Botto Mechanical

HVAC Contractor: Heritage Air System

Fire Protection: Active Fire Sprinkler

Stone Restoration: Aztec Service Group

Marble Restoration: Artisan Tile and Marble

By researching original building documents and engaging in painstaking restoration “detective work” – using solvents to strip away years of paint from surfaces to reveal the priginal colors and designs.

“The interior finishes were opulent and beautifully designed and installed,” one juror said.

The team also installed a new 4,500-sq. ft. skylight in the atrium, replacing a smaller skylight previously covered to conform to blackout laws during World War II. During construction, crews covered the opening with a prefabricated structure to protect the atrium.

The project also involved removing and replacing all mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, as well as replacing or reinforcing masonry shafts to accommodate the installation of new freight and passenger elevators.

The team built a monumental stairway along the western side of the building that leads to three separate entrances constructed to accommodate the differing access and security needs. The team also installed blast curtains on all windows and placed security bollards around the building's perimeter.

The project survived the bankruptcy of J .A. Jones Construction, the original contractor. Bovis Lend Lease of New York restarted and completed the project. <<