

HOMES & ESTATES MAGAZINE

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Reinventing aging, often forgotten buildings — restaurants ensconced in old churches or chic lofts carved out of former factories — not only preserves our history but creates energy in previously neglected neighborhoods. This trend of “adaptive reuse” extends to the luxury market as well, with elegant residences and five-star hotels occupying unexpected old structures.

Like Rolls-Royce or Cartier, the very name Ritz-Carlton exudes luxury, and most of the brand’s properties are stately structures or gleaming towers. But The Ritz-Carlton Georgetown, Washington, D.C., located in one of the city’s most desirable neighborhoods, occupies a former incinerator. In 2003, the long-neglected 1932 landmark debuted as a mixed-use project that includes the 86-room luxury hotel, 28 Ritz-Carlton-branded residences (with prices approaching \$14 million) and a theater complex.

Citing the building’s unique industrial heritage, hotel general manager Marcus A. Loevenforst states, “There are many distinct features that set us apart from other hotels in the Ritz-Carlton portfolio.” The award-winning project, designed by New York-based Handel Architects, has become popular not only with



An 1884 hospital, long neglected, was repurposed into one of Manhattan's premier residential addresses.



PHOTOS BY JOHN BARTLESTONE PHOTOGRAPHY



Dated offices at the Woolworth Building, one of New York's most iconic skyscrapers, were transformed into luxury residences.



PHOTO BY WILLIAMS NEW YORK

preservationists but sophisticated travelers as well.

"Our architects saw an incredible opportunity to weave the history of Georgetown into the entire guest experience," says Loevenforst, noting the lobby's prominent wood-burning fireplace, a restaurant named Degrees Bistro and the Fahrenheit Ballroom. Even the structure's 160-foot red brick smokestack has been put to extraordinarily clever use as a private event space called The Chimney Stack. One round 12-seat table fits perfectly in this intimate dining room whose glass ceiling offers a glimpse of the stars.

455 Central Park West, where residential units command multi-million dollar price tags, was never intended to house Manhattan's moneyed elite. The Gothic Revival-Château Style building was originally constructed in 1884 as New York Cancer Hospital, ultimately abandoned in 1974. Thirty years later the Upper West Side building, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was converted into 20 luxury residences by New York's RKT Architects, a firm that pioneered adaptive reuse. "In the '70s and '80s the area had declined," says RKT managing principal Peter Bafitis, who adds, "This project became a catalyst for the regeneration of the neighborhood."

Appreciating the pedigree of the original

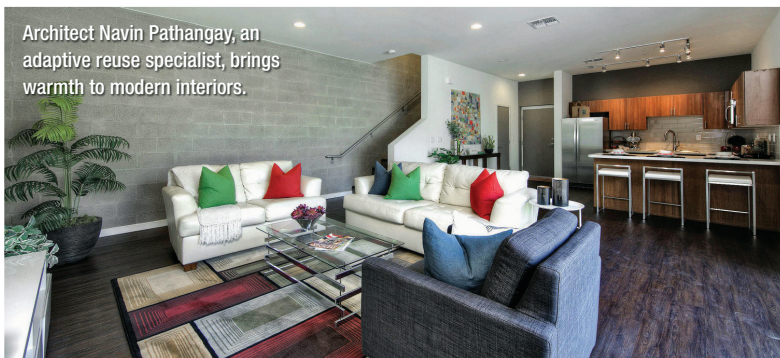
Charles C. Haight-designed building, Bafitis says, "These were spectacular spaces so we thought they should be utilized in the grandest way possible." The architect, who views adaptive reuse as a challenging yet rewarding specialty, reports the hospital's chapel was converted into the most opulent of the residences. In 2012, after once being on the market for \$17.5 million, that one-of-a-kind unit was sold for more than \$8 million.

Alchemy Properties purchased the top 30 floors of Manhattan's Woolworth Building, converting offices into luxury condominiums worthy of the building's fashionable Tribeca neighborhood. The 1913 Neo-Gothic landmark, which Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic Paul Goldberger called the "Mozart of Skyscrapers," is now one of the city's best residential addresses with interiors from renowned restoration designer Thierry Despont. "When we first heard about it we were skeptical, but after touring the tower we realized it had incredible potential," reports Alchemy partner Alex Saltzman, who suggests the building's design actually lends itself better to residential use.

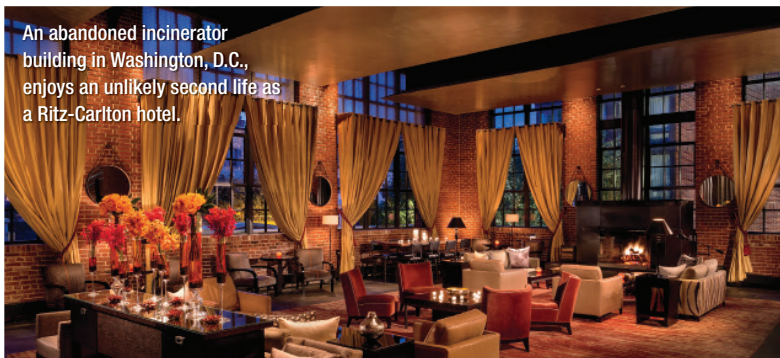
"We spent a year with our design team putting together the most respectful and responsible way to repurpose it as residences and prepare the



In Phoenix, an obsolete homesite was sensitively converted into modern multifamily units.



Architect Navin Pathangay, an adaptive reuse specialist, brings warmth to modern interiors.



An abandoned incinerator building in Washington, D.C., enjoys an unlikely second life as a Ritz-Carlton hotel.



Architects balanced preservation and transformation in these high-end residences at Chicago's Art Deco Palmolive Building.



COURTESY OF NAVIN PATHANGAY; PHOTOS BY STEPHEN K. SHERWIN PHOTOGRAPHY

COURTESY OF RITZ-CARLTON; © DON RIDDLE IMAGES 2013

NEAR PHOTO BY JON MILLER © HEDRICH BLESSING PHOTOGRAPHERS

building for its next 100 years," says Saltzman. The Woolworth Tower's penthouse — referred to as "The Pinnacle," its 9,700 square feet is spread over four-and-a-half-floors — reportedly hit the market in 2017 for a startling \$110 million. Currently a unit encompassing the entire 40th floor, with breathtaking views, is on the market for \$21.325 million.

Alchemy relocated an intricate plaster ceiling, originally in Frank Woolworth's office, to the residential lobby to enhance homeowners' connection to the building's history. Buyers tend to be people with an appreciation of architecture, notes Saltzman. "To many people growing up in New York, the Woolworth Building has a magical quality," he says, adding, "They view architecture as art and now they have an opportunity to live in a work of art."

As a graduate student at the University of Michigan, Navin Pathangay's fascination with adaptive reuse was reinforced as he observed abandoned factories, schools and theaters in Detroit. "I thought to myself, 'What can we do as architects to ensure that buildings designed for a specific use can be adapted to another?'" He wrote his thesis on adaptive reuse and as founding principal of Phoenix-based Pathangay Architects, he made it a specialty of his practice.

Pathangay's first adaptive reuse project was the reimagining of a hair salon into a trendy restaurant, followed by another eatery carved out of an abandoned gas station. He is currently converting a neglected house in Phoenix into a luxury residence with sleek Mid-Century Modern aesthetics. While the design is a dramatic departure from the existing architecture, Pathangay attempted to transfer some of the character of the original structure into the new home. "Adaptive reuse always makes sense in terms of repurposing materials on the site, such as brick [from the original façade] being reused for paving," illustrates the architect.

Through adaptive reuse, Chicago's Art Deco Palmolive Building (remembered by Chicagoans of a certain age as the Playboy Building) is enjoying a new life. Draper & Kramer, the developer, collaborated with Chicago architects Booth Hanson to convert the 37-story landmark into high-end residences, with retail remaining on the ground floor. Founding principal Laurence Booth recounts that the original storefronts featured diminutive windows unacceptable to current-day retailers. With a flashy Louis Vuitton boutique now enjoying 14-foot-high windows, Booth states, "We incorporated elements from the original design to retain the spirit of the building."

That same balance between historic preservation and transformation was applied to the condominiums. "We were very conscious of interior detailing, to be empathetic to the exterior," explains Booth. Currently, a 6,300-square-foot unit in the building is on the market for \$6.125 million.