

# BOUTIQUE design

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## SPACE CRAFTER

KRISTOFER KEITH  
SPACECRAFT DESIGN GROUP



## BORN-AGAIN BUILDINGS

**ADAPTIVE REUSE** (AR) projects are all the rage these days. Over the past several months, I've received a seemingly endless stream of announcements about existing commercial properties being turned into hotels and other hospitality venues.

While office buildings may be the prime targets for AR, other types of structures are also being given new leases on life. For example, this past summer, a century-old former federal courthouse in Tampa, Fla., re-entered the local scene as a 130-key Le Méridien hotel.

In renovating that property, many of its existing architectural elements were preserved and updated, including the marble and terrazzo lobby, as well as the oak door frames and window casings throughout the building. "Our design approach for Le Méridien Tampa—juxtaposing the old with the new in a nod to our mid-century roots—lends itself well to adaptive reuse projects such as this one," said Brian Povinelli, global brand leader for Le Méridien and Westin Hotels at Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide.

Another interesting AR project is Aparium Hotel Group's plans to redevelop the historic Detroit Fire Department headquarters into The Foundation Hotel, an independent, 100-key upscale property that's slated to open late next year. The redesign of the hotel's ground floor will include the creation of a restaurant in its former fire engine hall, as well as retail space showcasing Detroit- and Michigan-based firms. "The Foundation Hotel will be an inspiring and transcendent place—a

true reflection of what is happening in Detroit, a city rich in history, art, architecture and culture," said Mario Tricoci, Aparium's ceo/managing partner.

To unearth the economic and demographic factors that are driving the AR trend, as well as to delve into the special challenges such conversions present to designers, I interviewed a trio of experts who are doing some noteworthy work in this sector. They are:

- Jim Stapleton of FRCH Design Worldwide, which recently served as design architect for the conversion of a former bank building in downtown Cincinnati into a Renaissance Hotel.
- Michelle Bové of GrizForm Design Architects, whose AR projects in and around Washington, D.C., include the Agua 301, Doi Moi and Iron Gate restaurants.
- John C. (Jack) Portman III of John Portman & Associates, which is creating a Hotel Indigo in the lower floors of an Atlanta office building that the Portman firm originally designed a half-century ago. (Talk about bringing things full circle!)

Their insights into the AR phenomenon are detailed in the "Urban Renewal" feature that starts on page 28. Read it and reap.



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# URBAN RENEWAL

CHRISTIAN DOHN, DOHN STUDIO (RENAISSANCE CINCINNATI  
DOWNTOWN HOTEL); COURTESY OF FRCH (STAPLETON); SCOTT SUCHMAN  
(BOVÉ); COURTESY OF JOHN PORTMAN & ASSOCIATES (PORTMAN)





1 In converting a historic bank building into the Renaissance Cincinnati Downtown Hotel, Cauhaus Design created a lobby that pays homage to the property's heritage through such elements as the fluted desk front that references the existing columns.

Designers turning offices, banks and other commercial buildings into hospitality venues must meld a passion for the past with a vision for the future.

BY MATTHEW HALL





**2** This ornate, vaulted ceiling was formerly part of the Bartlett Building's banking hall. It now presides over the Renaissance Cincinnati Downtown Hotel's main ballroom/events space.

**3** In Agua 301, a Mexican restaurant housed in what was a lumber shed, GrizForm incorporated an overhead wood trellis that mimics the steps of a Mayan pyramid.

**IF YOU'RE NOT ALREADY** working on adaptive reuse (AR) projects, you soon will be. Across the U.S. (as elsewhere around the world), buildings that once housed fire stations, banks, offices and warehouses are being converted into hotels, restaurants and other hospitality spaces that celebrate and preserve their past, while also incorporating the modern amenities expected by today's consumers.

Offering insights into what's driving this trend—as well as what special challenges AR projects entail for designers—are three experts working in this red-hot arena: James Stapleton, principal, operations manager and design architect, hospitality, FRCH Design Worldwide; Michelle Bové, studio director, GrizForm Design Architects; and John C. (Jack) Portman III, vice-chairman of Portman Holdings and John Portman & Associates.

The proliferation of AR projects, the trio says, stems from a confluence of economic and demographic forces. Stapleton points to a lack of new-build sites in urban centers, many of which are experiencing an economic rebirth. "More and more young professionals, as well as empty nesters, like the idea of living or staying in walkable, livable urban settings," he says.

In a similar vein, Portman says AR projects are one way hoteliers in particular can quench today's travelers' quest for authentic experiences. "More and more hotel guests want their stays to



CHRISTIAN DOHN, DOHN STUDIO (RENAISSANCE HOTEL); PAUL BURK PHOTOGRAPHY (AGUA 301)



reflect the destination,” he says. “Even the most brand-loyal guest now expects a different experience in a Miami Beach location than what they would find from the same brand in Manhattan. So, what better way to truly capture the essence of a place than by repurposing buildings that are already part of the fabric of the place?”

Also at work, says GrizForm’s Bové, is what she describes as “the DIY/rustic/industrial aesthetic” movement that was born during the Great Recession. “That downturn spurred designers to reuse items and spaces in ways that create authentic experiences,” she says.

For all their popularity, AR projects present some unique and sometimes vexing challenges for designers. As an example, Portman points to his firm’s work to convert eight lower floors within the 27-story 230 Peach Street office building in downtown Atlanta into a Hotel Indigo. (The firm’s plans for the tower include renovating the floors above the hotel as state-of-the-art office space.)

Portman notes that that 50-year-old building was originally designed by his firm. “But it’s not like our old plans told the story of what exists in the building today,” he says. “We discovered that a half-century of tenant fit-outs and upgrades had created a situation where existing conditions were inconsistent from floor to floor, and in some cases, from office to office. That made converting the office bays into configurations suited to today’s guest rooms all the more problematic.”

Changing an office building into a hotel also typically entails making major overhauls to the structure’s entrance and exit systems, FRCH’s Stapleton notes. His firm ran into that situation in its role as design architect for the conversion of the historic Bartlett Building in Cincinnati—a century-old structure designed by legendary Chicago architect Daniel Burnham—from a bank headquarters into the Renaissance Cincinnati Downtown Hotel. (Cauhaus Design did the project’s interiors.)

“The original building had its main banking hall on the second floor, and our plans involved converting that space into a meeting and ballroom space,” he explains. “But in making that decision, we had to install several new stair towers to accommodate the increased foot traffic that would be going up to that area.”

There’s also the issue of figuring out which features in an existing building to keep—and which ones have to go. In some cases, GrizForm’s Bové notes, local historical societies or ordinances play a major role in such decisions.



**4** The Doi Moi restaurant in Washington, D.C., marries an existing, historic building and a new addition. GrizForm unified the two spaces by installing a bar that runs the length of them both.



**5** A half-century ago, John Portman & Associates designed the office tower at 230 Peach St. in Atlanta. The firm is now back in that building, designing a Hotel Indigo that will be housed on eight of its lower floors.

ERIC LAIGNEL (DOI MOI);  
COURTESY OF JOHN  
PORTMAN & ASSOCIATES  
(230 PEACH ST.)





6

She has seen those entities impact several GrizForm projects, including Agua 301, a new Mexican restaurant the firm designed in the historic Lumber Shed within the newly redeveloped Navy Yard complex in Washington, D.C. The district's Office of Planning's Historic Preservation Review Board required that the columns in the space remain untouched, except for lighting, she says.

"We responded to that requirement by hanging a Mayan-inspired, wood trellis structure from the ceiling. The trellis wraps the columns, thereby celebrating them, while also providing shade from the floor-to-ceiling windows that were installed to highlight the shed's concrete box and its open plan."

And sometimes, what seems like a no-brainer decision on which features to retain and reuse gets complicated. Stapleton notes that the Bartlett Building is home to a striking lobby and bank vault in its basement. But for now, at least, they're not part of the new Renaissance hotel.

"While everyone involved with the project really wanted to convert that area into some kind of usable space, it did not fit with the essential project program that was needed to make the hotel function," he says. "We have mothballed this space so that it may be converted into a new use in the future."

That decision, he notes, reflects these punch-list items for such projects: "The goal in any adaptive reuse project is to save everything possible, as long as it does not make the building less safe, hinder the needed building functionality, or become too costly to preserve and/or maintain." ●

6 The Waldorf Astoria Shanghai on the Bund incorporates a former private club and a new guest room tower. In restoring/ updating the club, John Portman & Associates strove to keep as many existing features as possible, including its marble floors and wrought-iron balusters.

COURTESY OF JOHN PORTMAN & ASSOCIATES