Design Statement

Prior to being sold in December 2015 the building at 1317 N. Pennsylvania sat vacant for over two years and for years prior to that had been only partially occupied. Located on a main thoroughfare in the Old North Side historic neighborhood, the building was in an advanced state of dilapidation. The new owner, working with limited resources, cleaned, repaired and reconstructed exterior components as required to make the building sound, returning it close to its original condition. The interior was gutted and fitted out for two separate creative businesses.

Construction began with the demolition of the upper level, which had sustained water damage and been substantially gutted prior to purchase. The demolition revealed sound bones….12" masonry exterior walls with 4" limestone veneer. Steel and concrete pan interior construction, solid steel stairs. The upper level was being reimagined for a young and growing Advertising Agency, and a separate smaller creative business.

Engaging the project as both architect and archaeologist during the demolition, the base building condition was interrogated; peeling plaster on the perimeter walls, the layering of time embodied in plaster revealed as wallcovering was removed, the rugged beauty of the concrete slab, ground, sealed and celebrated. Moments that embodied the rich and rugged history of the close to seventy year old building were embraced and allowed to have a voice in the design alongside the new. Exposed trusses in the ceiling were sandblasted and painted and highlighted through the use of LED strip pendants with an up light component. Loose plaster was removed from perimeter walls which were then sealed and made sound through thick application of white paint, the concrete slab was ground, stained and sealed; the rugged textures juxtaposed against the clean lines of the new construction.

The offices and support areas were organized around the building perimeter, respecting the simple orthogonal lines of the existing building and freeing a large open space at the center to house the agencies design studio. A series of custom workstations constructed out of CNC milled pre finished sheet goods were floated in the open space to house the designers, the exuberant geometries of the stations reflecting the creative energy of the studio.

Personal “pods” extend above the work surfaces punctuating the space throughout the studio and giving designers privacy and space for personal items. A free floating kiosk housing the creative director and serving as a pin up area for discussion and ideas combines with the workstations to create a casework installation set in dialogue with the base building condition. A waterjet fabricated installation of aluminium and plexiglass “petals”, the “butterfly”, hovers above the design studio, working with the irregular geometries of the stations to soften the acoustic reverberance of the room while at the same time symbolizing the creative spirit of the firm. Original artwork sourced from local artists reinforces the spirit of the place and selectively punctuates the interior. A smaller tenant space for another creative business completes the fit out of the space (image 14).

New double glazed windows coupled with new efficient HVAC equipment, the addition of operable windows, and all new LED lighting dramatically improved the building’s energy performance. All sheet goods are formaldehyde free and adhesives and finishes were specified as low / no VOC.
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Exposed plaster at entry lobby:

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New exterior signage presents itself on the buildings interior