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A Historic Rehabilitation Mixes Preservation and Technology with Cocktail Culture

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Trapolin-Peer Architects Virtual Reality

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New Orleans' French Quarter was bustling in the mid-1800s. Pharmacist Antoine Peychaud invented the Sazerac cocktail (the first mixed- spirits drink to be called a "cocktail") and—just blocks away—two new 5-story buildings rose in the neighborhood. Both the cocktail and the buildings still exist, but the 150-year-old buildings have been vacant for three decades. When the Sazerac Co. wanted to showcase its New Orleans presence, the abandoned properties were a natural fit from a historical, cultural and branding perspective.

Ambitious plans to revitalize the buildings and their prominent French Quarter locale challenged local firm Trapolin-Peer Architects to combine an operational distillery, interactive cocktail museum, rentable event venue and corporate offices into one destination space.



Trapolin-Peer Architects was challenged to combine an operational distillery, interactive cocktail museum, rentable event venue and corporate offices into one destination space.

“The complex program is a matrix of uses, all with their own special requirements,” says Peter Trapolin, FAIA, founding principal of Trapolin-Peer Architects. “And the buildings are designated landmarks, so we had to preserve as many original aspects of the buildings as possible to meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic Rehabilitation.”

UNCONVENTIONAL BLEND

Over the years, the buildings endured numerous insensitive renovations and were eventually interconnected, serving most recently as one department store. Store representatives built ramps to provide customer access across the buildings, but those ramps posed ADA challenges. To address this issue, the team created a raised-access floor system across the entire footprint of one building, effectively aligning the floorplates across both buildings.

Building settlement created conditions where floors were out of level by nearly 1 foot in many locations. To further complicate matters, former construction of an adjacent hotel modified one of the building's structural footings, causing it to slowly sink toward the hotel.

The team utilized cutting-edge technology to assess existing conditions. "One of the most compelling aspects of this project is how high-tech can support the restoration of a historic building," says Shea Trahan, associate at Trapolin-Peer Architects. "With the buildings' differential settlement, there were entire floors we couldn't walk on. Three-dimensional scanning gave us a level of detail we couldn't have gathered in field measuring."

The 3D scans also revealed the walls were out of plumb, which complicated the placement of new steel beams at elevator shafts. When the team removed plaster, it also discovered the load-bearing masonry walls were structurally failing.

While the contractor performed low-pressure mortar injection to refortify the masonry walls and structurally reinforced some of the buildings' wood structures, designers turned to virtual reality (VR) to coordinate the complex mechanical systems for the distillery. The architects and mechanical fabricator examined layers of pipes in meticulous detail for aesthetics and functionality in the VR environment. Then, they created an extremely fine-tuned model that virtually showed the distillers where their valves would be, the length of the piping run, the water's entry point, etc. This allowed the distillers to

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point out where they would need more clearance or different pipe locations.

“We knew that every pipe and pipe fitting had its proper place, even before the ceiling was put in,” Trahan recalls. “Without VR, we would’ve spent countless weeks in the field in a reactionary mode rather than proactively designing it to meet our standards.”

HIGH SPIRITS

The 52,000-square-foot project’s first three floors now house the interactive museum, exhibit space and distillery. The fourth floor contains the event space and a catering kitchen. Sazerac offices and a new penthouse, which was set back from the façade to maintain the buildings’ historic appearance, fill the fifth floor.



Distillers make Sazerac Rye whiskey on the first floor; blend and age custom rums from around the world on the second floor; and craft small-batch Peychaud’s Bitters on the third floor, which is bottled and sold onsite.

The architects cut a 3-story atrium in the center of the space and added a monumental staircase. During selective demolition, the team salvaged the original 3- by 14-inch floor joists and original brick flooring, long-hidden under topping slabs. “We reinstalled original brick floors in the atrium and transformed the floor joists into the stair treads of the contemporary staircase,” says Margitta Rogers, architect at Trapolin-Peer Architects.

The staircase rises next to an illuminated display wall of bottles from Sazerac-company brands that have connections to New Orleans, conveying the brand’s



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deeply rooted relevance to the town. The slender 3-story display wall casts a powerful glow within the public space. “Every element was thoughtfully designed to work in concert together,” Rogers affirms.

The building’s original 5-story cypress staircase stands on display as a historical artifact. Because the National Park Service wanted the staircase preserved, the contractor disassembled each piece with precision. Unfortunately, it was in such derelict shape that the full staircase was not salvageable. The team condensed the viable pieces and reconstructed a 3-story staircase instead, which remains visible in the museum but roped off for public safety.

PAGE BREAK

Historic beadboard ceilings were discovered during the removal of the wood joists for the atrium, and the National Park Service requested the beadboard ceilings be restored. This presented a new challenge in providing the acoustic mitigation that a museum requires. The team added custom-milled micro-perforated acoustic beadboard ceilings that absorb 90 percent of the sound within the space and built a very dense flooring assembly from multiple layers of mass-loaded-vinyl and acoustic plywood. “The acoustic treatments are excellent,” Trahan notes. “There can be a wedding with a DJ or a band happening in the event space without disturbing the museum space or the offices.”

CRAFTED COMPONENTS

Distillers make Sazerac Rye whiskey on the first floor; blend and age custom rums from around the world on the second floor; and craft small-batch Peychaud’s Bitters on the third floor, which is bottled and sold onsite.

When the team learned the amount of chilled water needed for the distilling

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The exhibit space brings the bitters' ingredients to life with old-apothecary-style drawers, containing the herbs, flowers and botanicals for visitors to smell.

an antifreeze system runs through a 2,200-gallon tank to produce 14,000 pounds of ice for the next day's distillation. Because a flawed 1990s renovation demanded reconstruction of on portion of the facade, the team was able to slide the custom tank inside the structure between columns.

"It's actually an energy-saving solution," Trahan notes. "What started as an impossible constraint turned out to be a really cool design response, and it's on display in the middle of the distillery space."

The raised-access floor system is built of white oak (similar to whiskey barrels) and provides a drain directly to the sewer system to protect the museum in case a large tank spill occurs during production.

For fire safety, distillery operations were compartmentalized from other spaces with rated assemblies and active fire-protection systems. The project also includes enlarged fire egress stairs and a state-of-the-art fire detection system that constantly measures the air for particles known to appear minutes prior to combustion. Fire-safety specialists ran a series of egress scenarios and proved that the enlarged stairs and early

process exceeded the entire building's chilled-water capacity, team members hired a company that makes thermal-energy tanks for hospitals to tailor a small one for the distillery. At night, when the electrical load demand is low,

detection system created a building safer than the code mandates.

CONTEXTUAL INFUSIONS

The clients wanted the project to exude the feel of the French Quarter, so Trapolin-Peer Architects distilled elements from the surrounding community. The original brick flooring in the atrium recalls the brick-paved sidewalks outside. Cast-iron detailing believed lost in prior renovations reappeared when an iron acanthus-leaf column capital was found hidden behind a pipe, and the team used it as a mold to recreate the building's acanthus leaf detailing.

Designers accentuated the authenticity of preserved historic elements with clearly modern touches. "We wanted to intentionally delineate between the new and old," Rogers says. "Thoughtful detailing gave us opportunities to highlight contemporary techniques and materials in the project."

For example, the staircase is reminiscent of the French Quarter's wrought-iron balconies in a unique way. "The staircase's 1/4-inch steel-panel, plasma-cut guardrail references historic New Orleans' railings, embellished with elements from the Sazerac Company's most iconic bottle labels," Rogers explains. In addition to the iconic "S" from the Sazerac Rye bottle, the panels include the star anise flower—an essential ingredient in Peychaud's Bitters and a mainstay of the Sazerac cocktail. At the perimeter of the opening, glass guardrail panels feature the recipe for the Sazerac cocktail, which is legible up close but the writing resolves into the background from a distance.

The exhibit space brings the bitters' ingredients to life with old-apothecary-style drawers, containing the herbs, flowers and botanicals for visitors to smell.

"This project engages all the senses," Trahan says. "It really manifests history and the Sazerac brand while

blending the flavors and experience of a cocktail into physical form.”

Retrofit Team

ARCHITECT: **Trapolin-Peer Architects**

- Peter Trapolin, FAIA
- Shea Trahan
- Margitta Rogers
- Matthew Buyer
- Cynthia Dubberley
- Patrick Daurio
- Caleb Sears



The fourth floor contains the event space and a catering kitchen.

ACOUSTICAL CONSULTANT: **RML Acoustics**

CONSTRUCTION PROJECT MANAGER: Joseph J. Holt
AIA LLC, (504) 812-3574

STRUCTURAL/CIVIL ENGINEER: **Morphy Makofsky Inc.**

MEP ENGINEER: **Moses Engineers**

HISTORIC TAX CREDIT CONSULTANT: **Rick Fifield Architect**

EXHIBIT DESIGNER: **Gallagher & Associates**

EXHIBIT FABRICATION: **Solomon Group**

CONTRACTOR: **Ryan Gootee General Contractors LLC**

MILLWORK AND HISTORIC WOOD STAIR
RESTORATION: **Picardie Timber Frame + Millwork**

CAST-IRON RESTORATION AND REPLICATION:

Robinson Iron

EXTERIOR CEMENT PLASTER: **Stewart Interior Contractors**

PLASMA-CUT STEEL STAIR PANELS: **Architectural Glass & Metal Inc.**

CUSTOM ZINC FIRE DOORS AND HISTORIC CORNICE RESTORATION: **Ray Brothers Inc.**

OFFICE INTERIORS: **Chrestia Staub Pierce**

OFFICE FURNITURE SOLUTIONS: **AOS Interior Environments**

BIM COORDINATION: **Pace Group LLC**



The architects cut a 3-story atrium in the center of the space and added a monumental staircase.

During selective demolition, the team salvaged the original 3- by 14-inch floor joists, which became the stair treads.

Materials

MICROPERFORATED ACOUSTIC WOOD CEILING: **Decoustics**

CUSTOM PLASTER MEDALLION AND NEW CORNICE: **Formglas Specialty Solutions Ltd.**

DISTILLERY EQUIPMENT: **Vendome Copper & Brass Works**

STAINED CONCRETE: **Scofield**

AIR-SAMPLING SMOKE DETECTION SYSTEM: **System Sensor**

LED CURTAIN: **LumiCurtain from**