

Adaptive Reuse

Unconventional Restaurants

Skyscraper Fire Barriers

SERVING ARCHITECTS, CONTRACTORS, AND OWNERS IN COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTION

NOVEMBER 2018 VOL. 16 NO. 11



Prime + Proper

DETROIT

The 11-story Capitol Park Building in Detroit, built in 1912 by Leonard B. Willeke, blends Chicago School architecture with Beaux-Arts decorative designs. It was originally home to a butcher, grocer, and a variety of tenants throughout the years, including the White Room Studios where musicians Aretha Franklin, Kid Rock, and Bob Seger recorded their hits. As the city experienced an economic downturn, tenants left the building and the structure became increasingly vacant. By 2009, the last business, a liquor store on the first floor, was gone and the building was sealed up and abandoned.

In 2016, the building was purchased by Grand Rapids, MI, developer Richard Karp and work crews began renovating the structure into the Capitol Park Lofts, a 63-unit residential complex. The project includes the Prime + Proper restaurant on the ground floor and lower level, and a floor of office spaces above.

Prime + Proper features distinguishing architectural elements that have been preserved and remodeled into distinctive spaces. The restaurant's main level features a bar area, dining room, open kitchen, chef's table, butcher counter, raw seafood display, and pastry station, while the lower level includes the dry-aging room, prep kitchen, bathrooms, and private dining room. Patio dining is available outdoors in pleasant weather. McIntosh Poris Associates, Birmingham, MI, is responsible for the architecture, interior design, and custom furniture to create a sophisticated dining atmosphere and modern interpretation of the classic steakhouse.

McIntosh Poris designed Prime + Proper to reinterpret classic steakhouse traditions with modern luxury. Reflecting the proprietor's concept of "prime meats and proper service," the new establishment is arranged into distinctive spaces within the angular L-shaped interior. The main level features a bar area and a dining room with groups of booths and banquettes that create intimate spaces for conversation. The open kitchen showcases a custom-built wood-burning grill, glass-enclosed butcher counter, raw seafood bar, pastry station, and wine displays to allow the cuisine to be part of the décor. The primarily black-and-white décor is accented with bronze details and rich finishes inspired by Art Deco designs of the past century to convey a luxe feeling.



McIntosh Poris designed Prime + Proper to reinterpret classic steakhouse traditions with modern luxury. Reflecting the proprietor's concept of "prime meats and proper service," the new establishment is arranged into distinctive spaces within the angular L-shaped interior. Photo: Michelle & Chris Gerard, courtesy McIntosh & Poris

From the street, patrons enter under a new steel canopy supporting metal letters spelling out the name of the restaurant. The canopy and graphics were designed by the architect and approved by city preservationists as compatible with the historic building. New operable storefront windows stretching along the street frontage provide views of Capitol Park from the 140 seats inside and swing out during warmer months to open the interior to the streetscape, where an additional 77 seats are provided outdoors.

Near the entrance, the animal-hide-faced bar features a quartz countertop simulating onyx to complement the marble-tiled floor. The hexagon pattern of the floor tiles in the bar and entryway is based on the Prime + Proper logo and repeated on the entrance-door handles, barstool arms, and steak knives.

In the main dining room, brass tables are topped with porcelain made to simulate marble. The tufted banquettes along the windows are upholstered with distressed leather. The dining-room furniture and swing-arm lighting are custom designed by the architect, who referenced vintage pieces with a modern feeling. Graphic black-and-white burnout velvet arm chairs, along with leather, hair-on-hide, and chenille upholstered booths and banquettes are combined with imported ceiling-lighting fixtures, marble tiling, and wood flooring to provide an energetic and glamorous setting.

Historic preservation requirements for the building mandated that the existing columns and ceiling beams remain intact and be expressed in the remodeled space. Inserting the necessary ductwork to heat and cool the space without removing the beams presented a challenge. The architect found a solution by creating large enclosures around the beams to conceal the equipment and emphasize the structure.

Prime + Proper's two floors are connected by the original, 100-year-old grand marble staircase that was restored along with its bronze railing. The stairs lead to the lower level past original wall panels that were repaired, painted, and fitted with smoked mirrors. A second staircase connecting to an upper floor was closed off, but left in place to provide patrons a place for Instagram moments along the stairs.

The lower level includes a 300-sq.-ft. dry-aging room that features pink Himalayan sea-salt-lined walls within a marine-grade stainless-steel enclosure. Diners are welcome to view steaks in this chamber to appreciate the variety and quality of the cuts of meats prepared and served. The special chef's table is tucked into a nook next to wine storage and arranged with chairs and a leather sofa. This niche is illuminated by a brass chandelier and showcases walls lined with protruding pieces of butcher block, the same wood used to cut the steaks served in the restaurant. CA

Nostalgia Is Not A Disease

Amazon and Google, and maybe China, are working on a vaccine, or maybe an app or a chip or something, that will expunge nostalgia from the consciousness of internet users and cause them to lust after the newest new thing.

Well, maybe I made that up, but it's not inconceivable. I mean, we already have Snapchat, which makes no bones about being anti-rememberance. (Life's more fun when you live in the moment!) And Amazon and Google exist for nothing if not promoting the next new thing.

The anti-nostalgia bias, ironically, has roots in the past. Nostalgia was once considered a psychopathological disorder. Doctors in the 17th to 19th centuries were convinced nostalgia came from a "pathological bone," according to a recent article in *The Atlantic*, "When Nostalgia Was a Disease." (<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/08/when-nostalgia-was-a-disease/278648/>). I suspect some researchers are still looking for that bone—or that a pharmaceutical company will come up with an anti-sentimentality pill whose main side effect, no doubt, will be depression.

Post Civil War, nostalgia was thought of as "something to be ashamed of, that those who suffered from it were unmanly, idle, and weak-willed." One doctor, the article reports, "proposed curing it with a healthy dose of public ridicule and bullying." Other cures suggested were leeches, purging the stomach, and "warm hypnotic emulsions." It's not clear, but warm hypnotic

emulsions may just have been an early term for Facebook.

Likewise, homesickness—a close cousin to nostalgia—is caused by the mind's desire for routine and attachment, a related article suggests ("Adults Get Homesick Too," <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/10/adult-homesickness/572218/>). Especially for younger adults, confessing to homesickness—or nostalgia—can be tantamount to admitting they've failed as grown-ups.

Susan Orlean, in *The Library Book*, (<http://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Library-Book/Susan-Orlean/9781476740188>) sees it differently: "...if nothing lasts, nothing matters. Everything we experience unfolds without a pattern, and life is just a baffling occurrence, a scattering of notes with no melody. But if something you learn or observe or imagine can be set down and saved, and if you can see your life reflected in previous lives, and can imagine it reflected in subsequent ones, you can begin to discover order and harmony."

She was talking about books and libraries, but that sentiment might be applied equally to the built environment, even as the ill-founded obsession with change-at-any-cost—move fast and break things—continues to be as fashionable as ever. Fortunately, adaptive-reuse projects, like those featured here, offer a nod to nostalgia and some solace to those who value the remembrance of things past.

On the downside, the failure of adaptive reuse was brought home to me not long ago when I

visited a favorite restaurant and found the once offbeat eatery that served a menu of Swedish and Midwestern fare had been replaced by a three-story abomination that is the architectural equivalent of a ransom note in it's profligate brew of forms and materials. While only the site may be said to have been used adaptively, I prefer to call the entire undertaking adaptive abuse. One wonders how it got past the zoning board, but having covered zoning boards as a reporter, I know the answer too well.

Oh, and the new place bills itself as a Neapolitan pizzeria—with a wood-fired pizza oven imported from Italy (geewillikers, how authentic) that cooks pizzas in 90 seconds, according to a chamber-of-commerce-like announcement. Wouldn't a microwave from China have been easier? The first category on the menu is antipasti, and that's an immediate red flag to me. For those unfamiliar with the term, antipasti (or antipasto, singular) means, especially if you're in a group, the fussy passing around of platters of picked-over, rubbery calamari while waiting for the main course—that 90-second pizza. Midwesterners, generally not raised in a multi-course dining culture, think antipasto is sophisticated because it's Italian. I just think it's overeating.

If I'm being nostalgic and averse to change, I make no apologies. Please keep your ridicule, bullying, leeches, and calamari to yourself. And while you're at it, leave some memories and continuity for the rest of us.

— Kenneth W. Betz, Senior Editor

DATA CACHE

Want more information? The items listed below are linked at commercialarchitecturemagazine.com/1811adaptive.

CetraRuddy Architecture, cetraruddy.com

Sugarcane Dumbo, sugarcaneawbargrill.com/location/brooklyn

Dyer Brown, dyerbrown.com

Tapstry, tapstry.restaurant

Spacesmith, spacesmith.com

Ladurie Soho, ladurie.us

McIntosh Poris, mcintoshporis.com

Prime + Proper, primeandproperdetroit.com

JZA+D, joshuaazider.com

Nomad Pizza, nomadpizzaco.com/princeton.tn

Despafia Princeton, despafaprinceton.com

506 Carnegie Center, carnegiecenter.com/amenities/on-site-cafes