

Design Build is DURING

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Often renovation projects get the “before” and “after” snapshot. Design-build emphasizes the “during”. As such, we offer a picture of the midst of our current storefront redevelopment project in a neighborhood marked by extremes of gentrification and poverty.

Our perennial community partner, OTRCH, owns several storefront/retail spaces in this dense, historic district. Though fluent in redeveloping historic buildings as affordable housing, OTRCH has less expertise in retail development, and sought our design-build program as part of a collaborative project team that includes students, consultants, contractors, and community.

This 750 square-foot project site needs significant structural repairs, masonry work, systems and utilities upgrades. Redevelopment costs exceed potential lease income. Meanwhile, adjacent sites in better condition are being redeveloped both as affordable housing and market rate condos, so timing is right to make this blocked up, forgotten storefront viable.

The first step entailed sorting the boxes stored in the space. While some had random debris bound for the recycling center, others contained important publications, documents, and signage that chronicled the People’s Movement, an ensemble of organizations founded by community members to address need and bring attention to inequity. Students recorded and archived the documents, curated a display of hundreds of protest signs and secured an off-site space for the collection, gaining a valuable insight into a 40 year continuum of People’s Movement activism.

With the storage load removed from the floor, we saw the extensive moisture and termite damage to the 150 year-old floor. As a former bar with leaky refrigeration equipment and dirt basement floor, the rot was exacerbated by the load of the boxes. The joists, rotted from their masonry pockets, sagged in the center. The unsupported stone foundation walls leaned inwards and the brick walls bowed out. Students, structural engineers and masons devised a solution to efficiently stabilize the building, which has three occupied residential units on the upper floors. A new 100 psf first floor has been installed on new steel columns and LVL beams, independent of the masonry foundation. Two structural “ribs” were framed in the space to brace the masonry.

Many of the salvaged old-growth pine 2x12’s were sliced into “bricks” to create a boveda-like ceiling for the seating area at the front of the space. As the space took shape, the housing provider secured an intent to lease from a community-serving grocery/sandwich shop. The design-build studio is coordinating equipment requirements and working with the tenant to determine finishes, aiming for a Fall 2014 opening.

In our Urban Residency Program, where design-build is a keystone of a broader interdisciplinary curriculum, participants recognize that site context is far more than the built fabric. The connections forged and sustained with neighbors, community-based organizations, consultants, contractors, and end-users inform the connections made on-site by the designer-builder. They temper design decisions and give reason to build, and that build becomes more than an aesthetic exercise focused upon rendered before and photogenic afters.

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protest signs found on-site... off-site storage space

stone foundations with dirt floor new floor assembly/anchor for “rib” walls formwork for new floor assembly joistings preparing to grout the steel-to-stone connection

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1400 republic street equipment plan

new floor assembly at stone wall old floor removed and stored in sections reclaimed joist CNC’d at business panel

current exterior, with blocked corner entry proposed exterior, with new storefront windows and re-opened corner