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Eye Candy

In a former Brooklyn sugar refinery plant, historic materials such as the original brick are layered alongside the contemporary steel and glass interior, for an experience like unwrapping a mystery confection.

By Thomas Renner

projects



The office block renovation maintains the original plant's brick façade, which can be viewed through the interior channel-glass and steel structure in a juxtaposition of old and new. *Image by Max*

Touhey

Architects face challenges in any project where they strive to meld new

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products and trends while remaining true to a building's historical roots. The task is especially difficult in transforming a structure of historical significance in one of the nation's most iconic communities.

For The Refinery at Domino, an industrial landmark in Brooklyn, architects from Bonetti Kozerski Architecture designed public spaces—including lobbies, office spaces, rooftop event space, and building amenity space—with an assortment of products that were as creative as they were unique. The reimagined 15-story, 460,000-square-foot office building is designed similarly to nesting boxes, with a brick façade on the exterior and a steel structure inside. Channel glass installed on the first-floor lobby helps tie the two elements together, creating a sleek, contemporary steel-and-glass interior that results in a stunning interplay between old and new.

"Our idea was in the same way that the brick structure is exposed, we thought to keep the new structure—which are these new steel pieces that you can see in the space—exposed as well," said Dominic Kozerski of Bonetti Kozerski Architecture. "So the story becomes quite clear that there's the old building and then there's a new building inside."

Sweet Views

The building served as the Domino Sugar refinery for nearly 140 years, from 1865 until the business moved in 2004 to another location. At its peak, the refinery employed nearly 3,000 workers and produced 13,000 barrels of sugar per day. The refinery served as one of the linchpins in Brooklyn's development as a U.S. industrial leader.

The office block is the centerpiece of a project by realestate developer Two Trees to develop a \$3 billion complex that also includes apartments, stores, and six acres of open space and parks. The \$250 million restoration of the office building includes arched windows to allow for natural light, a three-story atrium lobby, and a 27,000 square-foot glasscovered penthouse dome that allows for magnificent views of nearby Manhattan, the East River, and Brooklyn.

In designing the interior, Kozerski, Enrico Bonetti, and their team worked to preserve the building's original brick façade while introducing a contemporary

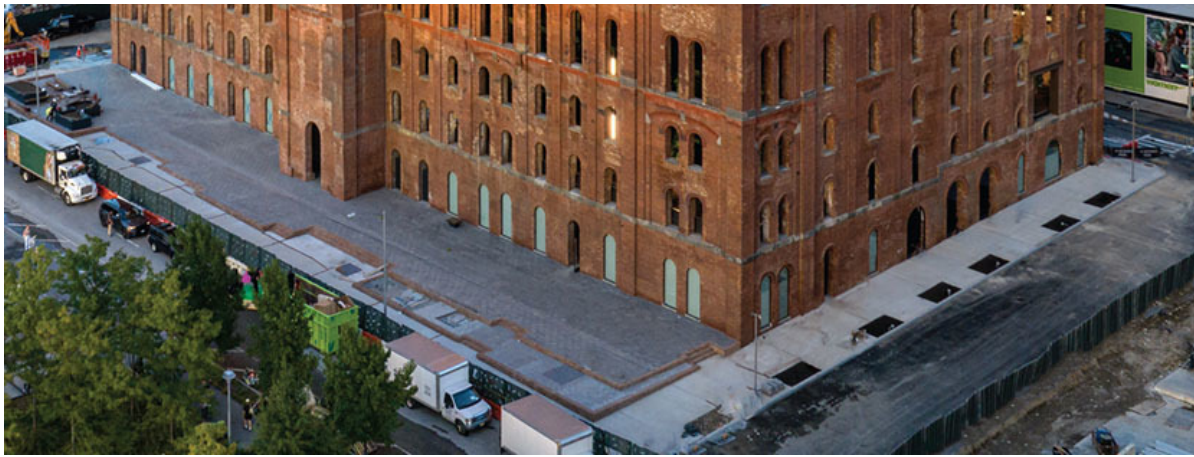
interior. "We wanted to make sure that the dialogue between the new and old was not lost," Kozerski said.

Crystalline Strength

The architecture team knew they needed to fill in between the steel structure with a third element that contributed to the design intent. "We thought it should be something that has a certain strength," Kozerski said. "If it was just a sheet of glass, that wouldn't feel as though it has strength. We felt the infill between the structures should feel as though they can stand on their own."

The team established lobby walls with channel glass from Bendheim, a New Jersey-based manufacturer of architectural glass. Channel glass is a specialty architectural glass system for interior and exterior wall applications, distinguishable by its signature linear aesthetic. The U-shaped glass channels are self-supporting, providing a structural solution that combines beauty and strength while standing as tall as 23 feet (7 m). The relatively lightweight ¼-inch (7-mm) thickness facilitates fast and easy installation.





Real-estate development firm Two Trees enlisted Bonetti Kozerski Architecture to design the conversion of the former Domino sugar refinery to a 460,000-square-foot office building as part of a \$3 billion mixed-use complex. Image courtesy of Bonetti Kozerski Architecture



The three-story atrium lobby fills with natural light from the arched windows, showcasing the interplay of neutral tile surfaces, a reclaimed oak and pine reception desk, and exposed, dark structural beams. Image by Max Touhey

Channel glass requires minimal perimeter framing, creating virtually seamless glass walls that can span across elevations. Bendheim collaborated closely with the design team to ensure the glass and framing system met aesthetic and functional requirements. Mock-ups were crafted to evaluate how natural light and

LEDs would interact with the finish and texture of the glass. With lengths up to 12 feet and custom angle cuts, the project required precision layouts and cutting. Communication between the Bendheim design team, the architect, and the Lamberts factory in Germany was crucial. The system's engineered aluminum frame extrusions required a custom textured finish to support the building's design.

The design with the different elements created a logistical dilemma in building the structure, according to Kozerski. "The hardest thing was to figure out the sequencing," he said. "You have these big pieces of steel, and the glass needed to be handled very delicately. If you have a piece of glass hit a piece of steel, it's going to break. We had to figure out the smartest and smoothest way to install the glass into a very unforgiving environment."

Pre-measured and cut-to-size channels helped keep the pieces intact. "Apart from an aluminum channel fitted into the flange of the structural columns, beams, and cross members to hold the channels in place, no other hardware or mechanical fixing was needed," Kozerski explained.

Brick by Brick

When workers demolished the interior, more than 2,500 square feet of brick remained available for reuse. After nearly a week of sifting through the pieces, some reclaimed bricks were used in the new lobby.

Concrete cast bricks by Gypsum with a low relief pattern are included on a stairwell that leads to restrooms and bike storage rooms. Fluted matte tiles from Nemo Tile + Stone were installed in the public restroom and products from Viroc establish the look and feel of black cement panels.

The reception desk and millwork in the elevator lobbies were milled from oak and pine beams reclaimed for the site at selective demolition.

The Refinery at Domino might be a new office building, but Bonetti Kozerski conceived a brilliant path to incorporate the structure's rich history while creating a modern workspace. The fusion of interior products old and new, 160 years in the making, delivers a new model for creating office space out of an industrial

relic. Some architects seek to bury the past. Maybe the better approach is to recapture it.

"I think the best way to keep a city alive is to think of new ways for the old buildings that are worth saving to be reused," Kozerski said. "To work on a landmark building like that is definitely really interesting, and to celebrate its beauty and its character, but then not be too reverent."

Thomas Renner writes on building, construction, and other trade industry topics for publications throughout the United States.
