



Classic Conversions

Two Brooklyn Landmarks Undergo Residential Transformation

by Diane Greer



One of Brooklyn's most famous buildings, the Williamsburgh Savings Bank tower, is joining the condominium conversion wave that swept Manhattan and has moved to the city's biggest borough.

Brooklyn's development renaissance is a continuing story, spurred in recent years by new zoning and real estate projects that are reshaping the area long identified as a commercial center into a hub of high-end residential projects.

Now, swept up in the transformation are two Brooklyn landmarks, one undeniably famous and the other arguably infamous, both of which are undergoing conversions into high-end residential condominium buildings.

The 40-story Williamsburgh Savings Bank, with its signature four-faced clock tower and gold dome, has been a beacon over the borough since 1929. The 512-ft tower is the tallest and probably most fa-

mous building in Brooklyn, and its stature was underscored last year when the developer of the planned \$4 billion Atlantic Yards mixed-use complex in Brooklyn was pressured by local leaders to scale back plans for a taller tower, eventually limiting the new building to 511 ft.

The bank tower's \$200 million conversion into 190 condominiums should finish in May 2008.

Six blocks to the west, 110 Livingston Street also has a long, colorful history, albeit with somewhat darker hues. Built in 1926 for the Benevolent Protective Order of Elks, the building was later sold to New York City in 1939 to house the Board of Education.

Over the years, the address became synonymous with bureaucracy and dysfunction in the city school system, which in 2002 moved to Manhattan. The Brooklyn building's new lease on life started with partial occupancy for new residents in early spring, while substantial completion of the 300-unit, \$105 million project is scheduled for August.

"Conversions to new housing in historic buildings like the Williamsburgh Savings Bank and 110 Livingston Street are helping transform Downtown Brooklyn into a 24/7, live-work community and thriving center of urban life that will benefit all Brooklynites," says Marty Markowitz, the borough president.

Reviving a Limestone Landmark

Though Williamsburgh Savings had been gobbled up in a merger years before and eventually became part of HSBC, its signature tower still had a bank branch and professional offices – including a large number of dentists – as late as 2005.

But in May of that year, HSBC sold the 400,000-sq-ft structure to a partnership between the Dermot Co. of New York and the Canyon-Johnson Urban Funds, a joint venture of two Beverly Hills, Calif., real estate firms – Canyon Capital Realty Advisors and Johnson Development, which is owned by former basketball great Earvin "Magic" Johnson.

The property held multiple attractions for the developers, says Kristen Neil, development project officer for Dermot.

"It is a one-of-a-kind asset in Brooklyn by virtue of its historical and landmark nature," she says.

Indeed, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the building a landmark, and its Fort Greene location near Atlantic and Flatbush avenues is next to the Atlantic Avenue transit hub and beside the Brooklyn Academy of Music Cultural District.

The developers rechristened the building One Hanson Place, its official >>

address, and launched a gut renovation last year to create condominiums, 40,000 sq ft of retail space, and 35,000 sq ft of medical and dental offices.

The limestone-faced building has a ground-floor banking hall with 63-ft vaulted ceilings covered in mosaic tiles and 40-ft-high windows overlooking Hanson Place.

The project team, which is headed by two New York firms, H. Thomas O'Hara Architects as designer and Hunter Roberts Construction Group as contractor, faced the hurdle of having the landmarks commission approve various aspects of the design along the way. One of

the bigger tasks the commission had to approve was replacement of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, says James Palace, project executive with Hunter Roberts.

Whereas previous owners had placed mechanical equipment on the building's setbacks, the team won approval to relocate the units, which many considered eyesores, by consolidating new equipment in the basement and placing cooling towers inside the dome, says Dan Gomez, senior project manager at O'Hara.

The changes required the project team to route water risers, boiler flues, gas piping, and exhaust ducts, which start in the subcellar, up through the building via shafts. However, because landmark rules prevented the team from making major changes to the vaulted banking hall in the middle of the structure, the team instead built shafts from the basement to a 19th-floor setback, where they cross the roof on structural elements and re-enter the building to connect with other shafts. Similar transfers occur on two other floors.

"Because of the building setbacks, there was a lot of coordination to continue the risers up the building," Palace says. "It is really a mechanical bear."

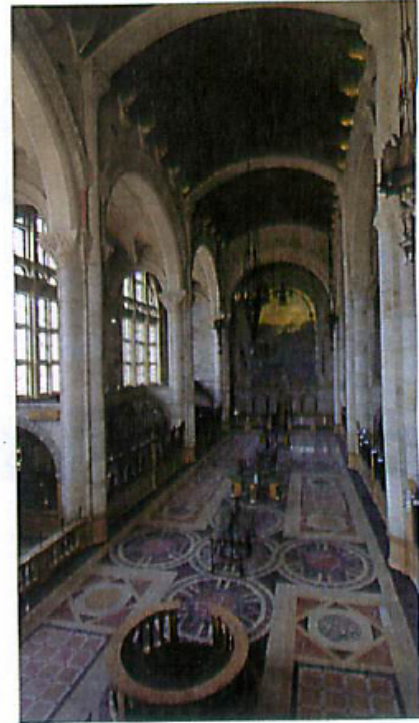
Meanwhile, installing the four cooling towers required the team to open the dome's vaulted ceilings to accommodate the new equipment's height and to add structural steel that will support the added weight.

"It's tight up there," Palace says.

Throughout the project, the venerable building has presented the team with unexpected chores, including removing archaic features.

"There is a crossover floor that looked like a huge mound of spaghetti, with every kind of pipe imaginable right in the middle of the building," Neil says.

The remaining tenants, mostly medical and dental offices scattered in the upper floors, also posed a complication. The project team focused its early work on building



The grand bank hall of the Williamsburgh Savings Bank will share duties in its new incarnation as a Borders bookstore and a lobby for the tower's retail and residential spaces.

out the lower floors to create new medical and dental suites for those remaining tenants, a task that required installation of M-E-P equipment that will be separate from the building's main systems.

Carving residences out of the rest of the building was also complicated because of the structure's deep floor plates, column placements, and window spacing, all of which varied by setback level. The architects leveraged these elements to create interesting layouts that tend to be larger than comparable units in new construction, Neil says.

Another design puzzle was how to create separate entries for the residential, commercial, and retail spaces. The effort required converting old entrances, building new ones, and designing a glass divider to separate residential and retail entries but not detract from the grand lobby.

"The glass partition has a gradual >>

Key Players

ONE HANSON PLACE

Owner: Canyon-Johnson Urban Funds, Beverly Hills, Calif.; Dermot Co., New York

Developer: Dermot Co.

Construction Manager: Hunter Roberts Construction Group, New York

Architect: H. Thomas O'Hara, New York

Structural Engineer: Goldstein Associates, New York

M-E-P Engineer: Edwards & Zuck, New York

Civil-Environmental Engineer: Langan Engineering and Environmental Services, Elmwood Park, N.J.

110 LIVINGSTON

Owner: 110 Livingston Development LLC

Developer: Two Trees Management, Brooklyn

Construction Manager-General Contractor: One Main Construction (affiliate of Two Trees), Brooklyn

Architect: Ismael Leyva Architects, New York; Beyer Blinder Belle, New York

Structural Engineer: Robert Silman Associates, New York

Mechanical Engineer: Ettinger Engineering Associates, New York



Construction continued on the conversion this year at 110 Livingston in Brooklyn, which will have four new glass-faced floors above the original 1926 structure, seen here from an interior courtyard.

placing mortar, and repairing brickwork, terra cotta, and cracks in the façade. The hands on the clocks have been removed for repainting and to restore the lights that illuminate the faces. In addition, the dome is being refinished and will get a new coat of paint, Palace says.

The team is also adding amenities such as a gym, children's playroom, library-business center, and sky lounge. Four public terraces are available for tenant use.

About 25% of the residences have been sold at prices ranging from \$619,000 for a one-bedroom unit to more than \$2 million for a three-bedroom unit. The developers are finalizing a lease with Borders for the retail space.

frit pattern that gets a little tighter toward the center then lightens out toward the borders so you can read the beautiful ceil-

ing as one space," Gomez says.



On the exterior, the restoration involves rebuilding parapets, restoring lintels, re-

Reinventing 110 Livingston Street

Two Trees Management of Brooklyn bought 110 Livingston in 2003 and soon

STROCCHIA IRON WORKS
Fabricators - Erectors - Suppliers
 Structural Steel & Miscellaneous Metals

Buy Direct and Save

Serving
**Commercial,
 Industrial,
 & Bridge
 Projects**

est. 1922

(718) 389-0691
 fax (718) 349-2852
 www.strocchia.com


84 Withers Street Brooklyn New York 11211

MADE IN NYC



Service Point
 www.servicepointusa.com

**Print and Document
 Management Technology**



- On-Site Services
 - Print equipment and expense tracking for your office or site trailer
- Project Team Web Tools
- Scanning & Archiving
- Printing & Copying Services

11 E. 26th St., 10th Fl. | New York, NY | (212) 213-5105

Boston | Providence | New Haven | New York | Philadelphia
 Washington DC | Virginia | On-Site Services Nationwide

engaged Beyer Blinder Belle of New York and Ismael Leyva Architects of New York as designers to create 300 condominiums and transform the building's reputation.

"It's a McKim Mead White building with great bones in a good location that's getting better every day," says Jed Walentas, principal at Two Trees.

The trapezoidal shape of the building complicated the design of the interior, Walentas says.

"There were a lot of decisions about what corner of the apartment you did not want to be square," he adds.

A major feature of the design is removal of a 15,350-sq-ft section of the building on the western side of an internal courtyard, which opened the interior space to sunlight and views. This portion of the structure was not ideal for apartments because it abutted the lot line and did not have a good floor plate, says Tim Macy, project architect at Beyer Blinder Belle.

"The building in plan was a square donut and we turned it into a croissant," Macy says.

But the design adds back that space and more in a 76,000-sq-ft expansion in four new stories being built atop the existing 12-story structure, along with nine new stories along Schermerhorn Street, where the building had a lower height.

The rooftop addition was designed as "a modern abstraction of a mansard roof," Macy says. Zinc metal panels and projecting glass bay windows cover the façade of the steel-framed addition. The building now encompasses 329,000 sq ft.

A major construction challenge was the lack of original drawings, which forced Robert Silman Associates of New York, the structural engineer, to survey conditions only after the demolition.

"[The demolition] exposed just about every piece of steel and every connection in the building," Walentas says. "There were probably close to 1,000 structural adjustments we had to make."

To add the four new floors, the team re-



The building at 110 Livingston Street, known for decades as the home of the New York City Board of Education and long associated with its bureaucracy, is being transformed into luxury condominium units.

moved the three-story terra cotta pitched roof and massive steel trusses supporting the roof, while also completely reframing the old 12th floor of the structure. The team removed old columns and replaced them with taller ones, providing additional height for massive transfer beams.

"We basically created a big platform up in that 12th-floor ceiling to support the addition at the top," Walentas says.

The team also installed a mat slab on top of the existing foundation to support the additional load of the new floors.

The project entails extensive preservation work, including restoration and repainting of intricate plasterwork on the vaulted ceiling in the building's original lobby, as well as restoration of the lobby's

stone floor. On the masonry façade, the team is recaulking, repointing, and cleaning.

Sales are strong, with more than two-thirds of the units under contract this year at prices ranging from the \$400,000's to \$1.3 million. The building features a full slate of modern appliances in the units and amenities such as a parking garage, fitness center, rooftop terrace, and landscaped courtyard. In addition, Richard Haas of New York painted a *trompe l'oeil* mural, a style that creates illusions of windows and other architectural details, on the courtyard walls, which "looks like an architectural ruin," Macy says. <<