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Thier + Curran Architects transform Hamilton strip club to housing and cultural space

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Hamilton-based Thier + Curran Architects has recently unveiled the 95 King Street East Arts Centre and Lofts in downtown Hamilton, a handsome new addition that emerged from the shell of a former strip club.

The City of Hamilton Housing Division engaged TCA to adaptively reuse this high-visibility historic building and former strip club into an arts centre with a multi-purpose gallery/event space, eight artists' studios, a meeting room and 12 loft apartments. Intended to contribute to the burgeoning downtown renewal well established nearby, this is intended as a catalyst for renewal of the Gore Park area, a triangular park that is at the heart of downtown Hamilton.

The building is well over 100 years old, with a 1923 façade that has been much abused over the years. It has housed a hardware store, a famous nightclub called Diamond Jim's, a pool hall and most notoriously and recently, a strip club. In its nightclub days, an intermediate floor was replaced by a partial mezzanine, which TCA removed to make a full two-storey-high ground floor, adding much to the drama of the ground floor spaces and the storefront.

With a modest \$3-million construction budget, 95 King is a bold and dynamic renovation that includes remarkable attention to inspirational elements and details for the artistic community it houses. The City envisioned a vibrant hub for the arts community, a facility with broad appeal and significant impact as a diversified centre for all the arts and for people of all ages, with a buzz of activity all day every day.

TCA's intelligent and passionate approach has yielded an exemplary model for affordable housing that far exceeds typical expectations. Whimsy, warmth, much attention to design detail, uncommon touches and bold colours allow the project to transcend the ordinary. Throughout, colour has been used as an inexpensive design tool to create a rich and vibrant environment.

The program for the project includes a ground floor 1,800-square-foot space intended as an art gallery and multi-purpose space. It is two storeys high with a fully glazed storefront, and is an inspiring and unique space. There are four main-floor studios each about 400 to 500 square feet, all two storeys and daylighted by clerestory windows. There are four smaller basement studios, a meeting room, shared washrooms and artist wash-up area, laundry, storage, etc. The upper two floors contain 12 one-bedroom loft apartments.

The architects intend the building to be inspiring to work and live in, and amenable to fostering community. Narrow windows in corridors engage residential apartment users with the arts spaces. Custom graphics designed by the architects include entrance signage to apartments and studios, including a panel for mounting of personalized identity mementos for the artist tenants. Custom floor graphics and washroom and stairwell signs were also developed in addition to arts-related inspirational quotes selected by the architects that were placed throughout the building on every apartment and studio door.

Soaring ceilings afforded by the existing building heights lend an expansiveness to the loft-style apartments which are modest in size, ranging from 500 to 700 square feet. Upscale amenities like parquet wood floors, frosted glass sliding bedroom doors and custom wood trim belie typical affordable housing expectations. Attention to detail has been carried throughout the modest apartments; kitchens have sinks with integral drainboards and gooseneck faucets, ceramic tile floors and mosaic glass tile backsplashes and sleek cabinet pulls and door bumpers. Light fixtures, electrical devices and hardware all received special consideration from the architects with an aim towards selecting stylish yet budget-conscious choices. Generous window seats in the front units provide comfort and amenity. Where possible the old and new have been sensitively blended with some units featuring exposed brick walls and wood ceilings as well as original steel columns and beams bearing the insignia "Hamilton Bridge and Tank Works"—a storied local company of times past. All apartments have roller blinds, are air conditioned, have high-efficiency combination water heater/furnace units and have in-suite laundry roughed in.

Bright colours, supergraphics, unique lighting, and custom-designed elements characterize the common areas of the building. The apartment lobby features custom millwork including a bench for lingering and a focal mailbox/bulletin board display wall designed around the fragments of an old wall safe. Patterned sheet vinyl floors provide low maintenance flooring in apartment corridors. Economical vinyl tiles in a random, multicoloured pattern are used in the basement corridor and finished spaces. Exceptional attention to design details can be found throughout; apartment unit entrances feature tile surrounds, lights and custom signage. Each entrance has oversized plastic laminate doors with matching transom panels and narrow profile metal frames with drywall reveals.

The arts centre space includes unique design features like a custom steel portal/bench/railing/drink rail at the transition between levels, unusual LED track lighting and super-slim T-8 suspended lights. Exposed brick walls contain fragments of past lives including old drainpipes, wood framing and damaged brick areas, all retained to keep the patina of history. All metal doors were finished by two local artists with metal work experience, Dave Hind and Tor Lukasik-Foss. Each door treatment is a unique, individual collaboration with the architects, and are made with hand tools like grinders, sanders and steel plate templates. Existing concrete floors on the ground floor have been polished as features, left uneven with the patina of history.

On the upper 2 floors, the front masonry façade has been restored with new windows that follow the original design and rehabilitated masonry. The simple dignity of the 1923 façade with its flagpole is contrasted by the dynamic new two storey storefront at grade.

Bold and unapologetic, the new angular curtain wall and faceted metal panel storefront offers a clear delineation from the historic residential façade above. It is accented by an indirect light slot and recessed accent pin lights in the basalt stone tile floor. The storefront is deeply recessed to create emphasis as a public building on the streetscape. It is dynamically angled and sculpted, with a soffit of folded smooth metal panels that wraps down and under the storefront. A thin raw steel railing prevents skateboard damage, and continues the raw steel motif outside, as with the exposed central column.

A massive custom wood pivot door of Brazilian cherry with custom designed pulls adds gravitas to the gallery entrance and is an identifying element on the storefront and streetscape. Rear walls of the top residential floor are clad in a simple corrugated metal siding with varied, patterned windows. The enthusiasm of the tradespeople working on the project is evident in the whimsical cross and "95" inlaid surreptitiously in the rear brick wall as part of the masonry repair work.

The sensitive preservation and integration of heritage features and the robust modern insertions have helped this adaptive reuse transform this building into a potentially powerful catalyst for further neighbourhood renewal, and have created a new hub for Hamilton's growing arts community.

Photos



[Larger photo & full caption](#)

File size: 140.4 KB (479px X 441px)

Caption: 95 king street east arts centre and lofts



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File size: 129 KB (458px X 441px)

Caption: 95 king street east arts centre and lofts