



From Retail to Residential

By Nancy Schuemann

For those shopping for a new apartment in a historic building, the Fries & Schuele Block, at W25th and W26th streets, may just be the place. Located in the heart of Ohio City's Market Square District, Fries & Schuele offers historic ambiance with modern amenities and convenience. Across the street is the landmark West Side Market with grocery, retail, and restaurants nearby. The downtown business district and sports complexes can be reached by public transportation and major highways.

Once home to the Fries and Schuele Department Store, the building has been renovated to retain its historical past while offering tenants a contemporary place to live.

Built in 1889, the three-story building was designed by architects Hubbell & Benes. Benjamin S. Hubbell and

W. Dominick Benes are renowned for their design of the classical revival style Cleveland Museum of Art, The Wade Memorial Chapel at Lake View Cemetery (working with Louis Comfort Tiffany) and were instrumental in the design of the West Side Market. The West Side Market and the Fries and Schuele building were the few structures completed in their plan for a public center in Ohio City.

Plans included a gymnasium, bathhouse and other buildings as well. In 1923, G. B. Bohm added the top two floors and the terra cotta façade facing W25th Street. Though Fries sold his interest in the business to the Schuele family, the building remained a department store until 1979. In recent years the building had been owned by The Great Lakes Brewing Company and had housed vats in the basement.

Remnants of the building's past as a department store have been retained and renovated. Most evident is the W25th Street entrance. The original vestibule complete with kiosks, restored ornate plaster ceiling, columns, and original marble remains, though now protected from the elements and enclosed in glass. The red Levanto marble, meant for interior and not exterior use, on the W25th Street façade had deteriorated. The pillars were recreated in foam core and faux finished to resemble the original veined marble. New green and white awnings add a marketplace ambiance, which is fitting because the vestibule area will house retail and food vendors. Retail space on the W26th Street side is occupied by Cleveland Public Art.

"The vision of creating an apartment, condominium and townhouse complex with an internal retail market that complements the West Side Market is remarkable. Being close to downtown Cleveland, access to highways for quick commuting, and a variety of ethnic foods are just a few amenities Neighborhood Progress Inc. can offer to its renters or owner. This will definitely give their competition a run for their money!" Mr. Steven W. Pumper, President of D-A-S Construction Co., explained.

The back half of the building provides the main entrance and address, 1951 W26th Street, to the 36 apartment suites. Two elevators, one configured for freight for ease in moving, were installed in original shafts. One shaft was closed-in. On the main floor it houses elevator mechanicals and, in the apartments above, was floored-in to allow for spacious walk-in closets. The fourth elevator cab remains, complete with historical detail, as a unique mailroom. Antique brass post office boxes adds to the antique look.

The space on the main floor had been essentially open. Original columns remained but many were missing capitals. Historic Pompeian-style moldings and plaster were also in disrepair.

"To replace missing capitals and to provide a perfect match, we created a mold and used plaster to duplicate the ornamentation," Mr. Rudy Libertini, Jr., Project Manager with the D-A-S Construction Co., added.

"The tax credits (provided through the state from the National Park Service in the

Department of the Interior) often prohibit owners from doing things that would take away from a building's character. The elements that pertain either remain or are recreated," Ms. Diana Wellman, Preservation Specialist with Sandvick Architects, Inc., explained. "(The Fries and Schuele building) is registered as part of the Market Square Historic District."

In addition to being a lobby and housing the mailroom, the first floor also has the main office, a spacious glassed-in, state-of-the-art fitness facility, laundry facility, public bathrooms, and an open stairwell leading down to a storage area and the future parking garage. The baluster and rails are restored originals. Spiral ductwork is exposed and unpainted. Floors are of neutral ceramic tile.

Apartments on floors 2-5 have nine different layouts, with one or two-bedroom suites, ranging from 900-1110 square-feet, rent from approximately \$705-\$1,200 a month. All feature raised platform bedrooms with windows allowing for light to filter in from the spacious living room areas. A closet contains a furnace and hot water heater as well as hook-ups for an in-suite laundry. Ductwork is exposed on the 11-foot high ceilings. Open kitchens feature white GE appliances, tall southern plantation hardwood cabinets with pantries for extra storage and black laminate countertops with raised breakfast bars in some suites. Neutral gray carpet covers the floors except in the living rooms where refinished original maple floors remain.

"One of the challenges was getting the old tar paper off (from under the sheet vinyl) to get to the original maple floor," Mr. Libertini stated.

Double-hung windows on the east and west elevations were refurbished with insulated glass. Four suites on the north elevation posed a special challenge due to the 18' x 11' windows.

"We created new openings in the north elevation windows. From a structural standpoint this posed the greatest challenge," Mr. Libertini added. "The existing construction in the wall was not what we expected. It ended up being three wythes of masonry and we had to install lintel beams."

French patio doors were also installed for the future addition of balconies, to be added once the second phase of the project, which includes a courtyard, is completed. Sixteen units will have outdoor balconies.

"The doors have been secured in place until Phase 2, when the balconies can be installed on the exterior of the building, to stand over the courtyard space," Mr. Marc Baniszewski, project manager with Sandvick Architects, Inc., explained.

Suites are equipped with telephone and data jacks and are wired for broadband. All new electrical, mechanical and HVAC systems were installed as well as a fully sprinkled life safety system. Condensers are located on the roof. The roof itself, a built-up modified Bitumen roof system, is brand new with extensive patching to the wood subsurface. The frame that once supported a water tower remains as a reminder of the building's age.

The exterior of the building created its own set of challenges. In addition to a complete masonry restoration, tuck-pointing, and cleaning, the white terra cotta and masonry parapets on the front and back facades had to be repaired.

"The front façade of the building (on W25th Street) was moving away from the rest of the building and had to be tied back to keep it stable," Mr. Emil Hach, partner with Hach & Ebersole Engineers, explained. "Metal scraps had to be anchored into the side of the terra cotta façade. On the back (of the building) the façade was falling apart above the roof, bowing and cracked, and was very unstable.

"We thought of dismantling it but decided to take areas out and made reinforced beams and posts instead. Without removing the façade, we retained the look and materials without the cost of removing and rebuilding."

The recent completion of the Fries and Schuele building renovation is Phase 1 of a two-part neighborhood block. Phase 2, set to begin in June, will include the leveling of the neighboring Family Dollar store and construction of four-story condominiums and townhouses surrounding an enclosed

courtyard, as well as, a two-level underground parking deck. Cost of the completed project, Phases 1 and 2, is estimated at \$17 million.

"The courtyard adds salable area to the project and dresses up/masks a secure parking garage," Mr. Baniszewski stated. "It creates a shared backyard and private area for residents and a community outdoor space."

Restoration of the Fries and Schuele Block is part of the overall redevelopment of Ohio City. Several institutions were instrumental in the project's success, including the New Village Corporation, Ohio City Near West Development Corporation, Metropolitan Bank & Trust, National City Community Development Corporation, the City of Cleveland, and Cleveland Development Partnership.

"There are several loft apartments in the neighborhood. We wanted to build on the market for apartments. Restoring a building in the epicenter of Ohio City was a motivating factor to convert the apartments into condominiums in five years to promote home ownership," Mr. Russell Berusch, vice president of Neighborhood Progress, Inc., a non-profit community development organization (of which the New Village Corporation is a real estate subsidiary), explained. "The units are a great price and good value. Located in a dynamic neighborhood it has an urban cache."

"(This project) helps redensify the neighborhood like it used to be with the addition of townhouses and condominiums to create more salable space," Mr. Baniszewski added.

"We wanted to state our commitment to redevelop Cleveland neighborhoods and are bullish on Ohio City and like to participate in its revival," Mr. Michael Dostal, vice president, Commercial Real Estate Lending, Metropolitan Bank & Trust, lender of record, stated. Metropolitan Chairman Bob Kaye has volunteered with Neighborhood Progress, Inc. "The project was on time and on budget and that's what banks like to hear. We are always looking for good projects, quality real estate, with experienced developers to find the funding. We intend to participate in Phase 2."

"I am looking forward to attacking Phase 2," Mr. Pumper added. "I am pleased with the quality and extremely proud of the project team we assembled for this job. Everyone understood the complication of putting together a project like this and we all came together not only to overcome the complications, but to finish the project on time and within budget. Project Manager Rudy Libertini and Project Superintendent John Colagiovanni really put a lot of time and effort into this renovation. It wouldn't have happened without their hard work and dedication. Unfortunately, John had to go in for surgery at which time Lenny Cvanciger took over and completed the project. Lenny, as expected, put forth the time and effort to deliver a seamless transition."

The Fries and Schuele Block carries on the name and reputation for quality for a new type of shopper, those seeking a new home in an up and coming, convenient, and vibrant part of the city.

