

# TRANSITIONS THROUGH TIME

GUARDING THE PAST AND BUILDING THE FUTURE WITH  
HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION

BY CHRISTOPHER CUSSAT

**A** FEW YEARS AGO while in Paris, I visited the famed Notre Dame. After a few moments of awe-inspired pause resulting from just being in the presence of such history and beauty, I noticed the scaffolding and green netting that covered most of one of the cathedral's iconic towers. I could not help but wonder who could be trusted and qualified to repair, clean, reconstruct, and touch such an untouchable work of art. It turns out there are many architects and builders who specialize in such intricate and important construction and restoration efforts.

Like any specialization, there are specific guidelines and approaches for working on historic buildings, not to mention an innate sense of responsibility to properly preserve these representations of our past. In 1966, Congress began taking legislative actions to preserve American heritage by passing the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

In addition to federal mandates, many companies involved in this type of work must also confer with local organizations for guidance. Anthony Carrino, partner of Brunelleschi Construction (BrunCon), transforms underutilized buildings in New Jersey into dynamic residential properties through the

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*Allan Teramura, Partner, WMTA*

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historic preservation of architectural heritage.

Carrino has learned that it is very important to be proactive in reaching out to local neighborhood associations, historic boards, and preservation societies when working on older buildings. “Usually in neighborhoods with historic designations there are very strong associations, and they usually have very strong opinions about preserving historic districts,” he says.

BrunCon finds it best to freely share construction plans with neighborhood associations and directly address their concerns. “In these cases, you simply have to know what is required and abide by it,” Carrino says. “Once nerves are calmed and the locals are informed, they usually welcome the proposed structure or restoration.

Of course, the United States is not the only country that is concerned with preserving its historic places. Watson MacEwen Teramura Architects (WMTA) in

Ontario, Canada, is currently restoring the exterior of the Halifax Armouries, originally designed by architect Thomas Fuller.

To address the challenges of historic preservation, Allan Teramura, partner of WMTA, explains that first, a great deal of analysis and testing is done prior to initiating any work so that the team understands the root causes of physical deterioration.

Teramura lists the challenges he experiences when working with and building in historic locations as:

- physical deterioration of buildings;
- finding tradespeople with the appropriate skills to do the work;
- reconciling new uses with historic structures;
- making interventions appropriate and sensitive to the original work;
- complying with current codes and standards.

In regards to finding properly skilled workers, Teramura says, “Whenever

possible, contractors are pre-qualified and must demonstrate experience with restoration work.” Carrino agrees, “An eye for detail and a great attention to quality are certainly traits that you want in your sub-contractors.”

Carrino says that in order to integrate new uses for structures, it’s necessary to be sensitive to the original and build something that fits in with older styles. “This is challenging, but not so much from a design perspective—the real challenge comes in finding the craftsmen who are capable of recreating certain masterpieces, such as the hand-carved cornices that are found throughout New Jersey,” he says.

Teramura agrees, referencing today’s preservation trends, “Contrary to popular belief, current practice recommends that new interventions in historic buildings and places be identifiably ‘of their own time’ and not a reproduction of historic construction. Also, new work should be secondary to the original, not overwhelm it.”

Along with code compliance, Carrino describes other preservation challenges similar to regular construction work—with one exception. “The difference is that the materials you replace are specified by historic boards and are inherently more expensive.” A simple example of this would be non-historic, aluminum-clad windows compared to historic, wood-frame windows.

According to the National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS), preserving historic buildings is essential to understanding our heritage. NIBS also points out that preservation is another level of recycling and sustainability. Perhaps, overall, there is nothing more important than preserving the art, history, and inspired creations of mankind. *ABQ*



To promote the protection of cultural resources, the Secretary of the Interior established the Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (STHP), which identifies four distinct approaches for the responsible treatment of historic structures:

**PRESERVATION**

Focuses on the maintenance, stabilization, and repair of existing historic materials and the retention of a property’s form as it has evolved over time.

**REHABILITATION**

Acknowledges the need to alter or add to a historic property to meet continuing or changing uses while retaining the property’s historic character.

**RESTORATION**

Depicts a property at a particular period of time in its history, while removing evidence of other periods.

**RECONSTRUCTION**

Recreates vanished or non-surviving portions of a property for interpretive purposes.



## Brunelleschi Construction

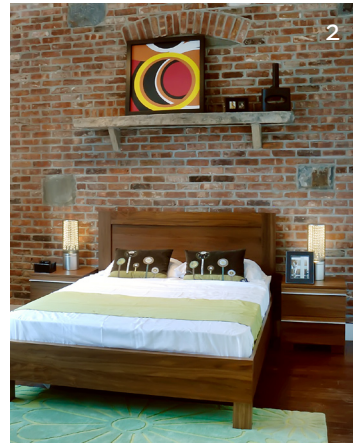
Preserving Old World charm—integrating new-world style

BY CHRISTOPHER CUSSAT

When one thinks of Italy, fine foods, golden Mediterranean sunlight, endless history, and distinctive music immediately come to mind. But perhaps the most evocative images associated with the boot-shaped country are evident in the designs of its breathtaking ancient ruins and other beautiful works of art that the Italians simply call buildings. Brunelleschi Construction (BrunCon), with its partners Alfonso and Anthony Carrino, is preserving history and keeping architectural traditions alive by constructing with its eyes on the past and reaching with its hands toward the future.

Alfonso (who also happens to be Anthony’s father) and his entire family had always dabbled in construction. But it wasn’t until Anthony graduated from college that the two seriously entertained the idea of going into business for themselves. “We just decided one day that our hearts were really in the building trades, so we started the business,” Alfonso says. That was February of 2002, and ever since, BrunCon has come very far in a very short time.

Concentrating in residential real estate and condominiums, the company’s entire current portfolio has been in the restoration of old buildings. “The mainstay of our business is transforming underutilized buildings into dynamic residential properties through the historic preservation of architectural heritage,” Alfonso says. “We’re hoping that, by creating differentiated, high-quality, and exciting housing within the urban core, we can capture a share of



## m650 Flats

1. A two-story addition to the building is set back seven feet on the south and east façades to create three private, wrap-around terraces.
2. The master bedroom in the model unit showcases a feature wall made entirely from brick and bluestone that has been taken from the lower levels of the existing building.
3. One of three private roof decks with panoramic views of Jersey City, NJ and Manhattan, NY. Brazilian Ipe tiles make up the surface of the deck.



“When you have the amount of control over a project that we do, you’re on top of everything everyday and you don’t lose any of those details.” *Anthony Carrino, Partner*

the hearts and minds that appreciate the finer things in life.”

One project the partners are particularly proud of is the m650 Flats, a sustainably designed building in Jersey City, New Jersey, that incorporates an environmentalist’s wish-list of green practices and products. In addition, BrunCon was able to beneficially incorporate its expertise in historic preservation on this project. “Not only is it environmentally conscious, but there are many aesthetic draws as well,” Anthony notes. For example, approximately 10,000 old bricks

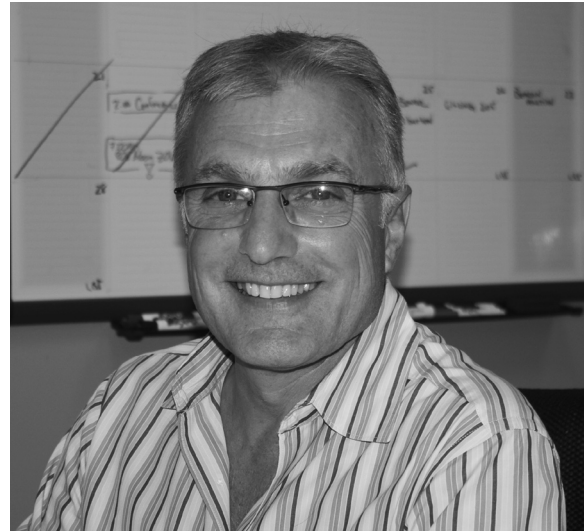
and many bluestone pieces had to be carefully taken down and preserved for later reintegration. The m650 Flats project recently won the 2009 Adaptive Reuse Preservation Prize from the Jersey City Landmarks Conservancy.

Alfonso’s connection to Italy helps to further define BrunCon’s philosophy, as well as the company’s name. “Our family has always had one foot in Italy and one in the US,” he says. “We have a residence in Florence and we’ve always been inspired by Filippo Brunelleschi, who was architect of the Duomo there—hence



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*Alfonso Carrino, Partner*



our company’s name.” He goes on to describe Italy as a country full of dichotomies of the old and the modern. Brun-Con takes its design approach from this, because in Italy you cannot tear down any of the Renaissance buildings or change the facades. “The buildings themselves have to remain as they are, but the insides of those buildings are as modern as you can imagine,” Alfonso says. “That kind of influence for over 40 years of my life has transcended me and gone down to Anthony—it’s where our inspiration comes from.”

A one-stop construction shop, Brun-Con is a developer, general contractor, and project manager. This is a competitive advantage because it allows the company to have full control of projects and pay close attention to minute details. Anthony elaborates, “You have your hands in each and every aspect of a project. When you have the amount of control over a project that we do, you’re on top of everything everyday and you don’t lose any of those details. When a problem does arise, we can handle it instantly.”

Perhaps the best thing about Brun-Con is that the entire team works together diligently as father, son, cousin, and

friend—and they have a great time. Anthony adds, “Whether it’s me, my father, my cousin and project manager, John Colaneri, or our full-time job super, Daniel Cleary—there’s always one of us there working.”

Alfonso agrees that it’s this partnership that makes work so enjoyable. “We like what we do and we want to do the very best that we can at building it—we just want to continue doing more buildings and have fun doing it,” he says. *ABQ*

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