

Old is New

“New is Old: History is Now back ‘In’ Style”

By Steve Wiser, AIA

Tear down all the old buildings. This was the view of most of the local civic leaders forty years ago. One such pro-demolition advocate made a joke about those who sought to preserve landmark properties: “You’ve heard about the new bomb, the one that kills the people but saves the buildings?”, he chuckled, “It’s called the historic bomb!”

The Rialto Theater, Columbia Building, Will Sales Building, and Washington Building, among dozens of other distinguished structures, were all lost between the 1950s and 1970s. Ninety-five percent of the buildings located between River Road to Liberty Street, and Second to Fifth Streets (12 city blocks) were leveled.



Funny how times, and attitudes, have changed. Historic buildings are now a significant economic force within the city. West Main Street was ranked as one of America’s best urban streets last year. Those who sought its total destruction four decades ago would certainly be surprised at how these former ‘eyesores’ are today’s top visitor attractions.

In a fascinating turnabout, the preferred design styles of the 1960s and 70s are the less desirable buildings of today. Generic aesthetics and impersonal facades are now considered unattractive.

This flip-flop has evolved to where some new projects from-the-ground-up are seeking to ‘look old’. The best example of this trend is Chamberlain Pointe, on Ky Hwy 22, just east of the Snyder Freeway. This just completed retail center takes its design references from West Main Street with decorative features like cornices, lintels, and a façade section inspired by Actor’s Theater.



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In downtown, the 222 Building (*below left*) on First Street had a facelift from a generic look to an older-style appearance with an upper protruding cornice and framed windows.



Just south of downtown at Fourth and Breckenridge Streets, the new Presentation Academy Arts and Athletic Center (*above right*) is of a traditional aesthetic with Richardsonian Romanesque details (*below left and center*).



Westport Village (*above right*), at Lyndon Lane and Westport Road, is another 'new-to-old' transformation. A former run-of-the-mill shopping complex was given an extreme makeover into a vintage contextual setting. Just on the outskirts of the metro area, at the I-65 and Hwy. 480 / Exit 116 interchange, there is a strip shopping center that just opened, but has a 'been-here-a-long-time' appearance. (*above right*)



Just south of the Snyder Freeway on Shelbyville Road is an First Capital bank building that is an exceptional detailed traditional replica. (*left*)

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Several new projects have incorporated large-sized photos of West Main Street on the interior such as the Greater Louisville Inc. building and the Crowne Plaza Hotel. In a bit of twisted logic, the owner of the 200 year-old Funk House at Taylorsville Road and Hurstborne Parkway thought it didn't look old enough and added a controversial rustic stone veneer over the original brick exterior.



Louisville has a superb collection of old-new 'hybrid' buildings where the exterior is historic and the interior is mostly new. 21 C Hotel, Science Center, Actor's Theater, Slugger Baseball Field, Unitarian Church, and Frazier Museum (*left*) are excellent examples.

Another popular trend from the 60s was the installation of metal screens over historic buildings like the old Atherton Building (Fourth and Chestnut, *Below*) and River City Bank



(Muhammad Ali and Sixth). Maybe these outdated masks can be taken off and the wonderful ornate facades can be reborn.

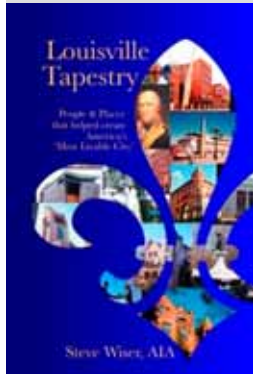
Just as bull-doing historical buildings wasn't right, cloning them in a Disney-esque manner isn't the preferred solution either. Nor is replacing them with non-descript, unappealing facades. The best approach is to either preserve, adaptive reuse, or build in an innovative distinctive style that creates a new 'landmark'.

The ultimate goal is to increase the quality of Louisville. A mosaic of notable new buildings like the Waterfront Park Place and the old buildings, like Levy Brothers / Old Spaghetti Factory, achieves this desirable result. And in 2008, being ranked the number one place to live in America is, in the end, nothing to laugh at!

For more info on Louisville architecture and history, refer to next page

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Interested in learning more about Louisville architecture and history? Then purchase one or all 3 of the following items prepared by Steve Wiser:



“Louisville Tapestry: People & Places who helped create America's Most Livable City”, 144 pages, over 100 b & w images, 2009.

Cost: \$15 (includes shipping and handling)

From the Olmsted Parks and landmark architecture, to fascinating tales on notable businesses and personalities, this book explains how the city evolved to its current state. Great for both native Louisvillians as well as new residents!



“Louisville Landmarks & Legends”, 25 minute DVD video, over 200 color images, 2008

Cost \$10 (includes shipping and handling)

This DVD features Louisville’s legendary business leaders and landmark businesses such as Col. Sanders, John Schnatter, J. Graham Brown, Al Schneider, and Tom Simons, along with landmark businesses like Humana, UPS, Hillerich & Bradsby, and Churchill Downs, among many others. In 25 minutes you learn many important aspects of Louisville!



“Louisville 2035”, 144 pages, over 100 b & w images, 2008

Cost: \$8 (includes shipping and handling)

What will Louisville look like in 25 years? This is Steve Wiser’s vision of how the city will evolve. It also contains many historical backgrounds on the city’s past developments and civic leaders. Several of these proposals have already started to happen! Find out more in this intriguing futuristic conjecture.

**To order, mail a check payable to “Steve Wiser”
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