



Loft links to local history Downtown conversions inject new life into old warehouse buildings

Shafraaz Kaba

Freelance

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EDMONTON - Edmonton's downtown is thriving with new developments and some of the most exciting ones have been the loft conversions.

These conversions have helped preserve the history and beauty of downtown.

The City of Edmonton has helped foster this preservation by providing grant assistance to developers who can reinstate this architecture. Instead of demolishing these structures, as developers have done in the past, they now value their ruggedness and emphasize the beauty of a building with history.

Loft living can trace its roots back to Paris in the late 1800s where artists squatted in their ateliers or studios. In large North American cities, artists also found inexpensive, airy open spaces with large windows to use as studios and residences. Manhattan's SoHo district is the perfect example, where artists illegally moved into vacant garment manufacturing buildings and warehouses.

The critical mass of people moving into a more industrial area tended to have a gentrifying effect, making otherwise gritty urban areas more livable. In New York, the planning department ended up rezoning the land in order to deal with large number of people living illegally in buildings not designated as housing.

In Edmonton, the old warehouse district has seen rapid redevelopment in the last few years. The area surrounding 104th Street has seen the largest concentration of loft conversions with buildings such as the Cobogo and Phillips lofts now being inhabited.

More of this trendy housing is on the way, including the Seventh Street lofts and Ellis lofts.

What makes lofts even more compelling to the people who live in them is the history behind the building and its past uses.

For example, the Cobogo Lofts are in a building once called the Canadian Consolidated Rubber Company Building. Built in 1913 by the Canadian Stewart Company, this building replaced the company's former location that burnt down earlier that year. The

period before the First World War included a huge building boom.

According to the City of Edmonton's summary of this historic building, the Cobogo is largely intact, and has seen little alteration since being built. It is also listed on the City of Edmonton's register of historic buildings with the highest A-listing level. It was originally built in the commercial style: retail space on the ground floor with warehouse and distribution above.

Interesting features are the verticality of this old warehouse building -- compared to others nearby -- and the detailed brickwork. The sides of the building still show hints of painted advertising of various past tenants including Army and Navy, Dominion Rubber Systems Alta., and Clark Bro. Co. Ltd.

The building is now home to 20 residents who enjoy the old exposed heavy timber post and beams, some exposed brick walls and original hardwood floors.

The Phillips building, formerly home to the Western Cartage Company, was designed and built in 1912 by Purcell and Foote using the latest fire-resistant construction for that time. Like the Cobogo, the Phillips building was designed in the commercial style common to the warehouses in the area.

An arcade used to run through the entire length of the building and was a unique Phillips feature.

In 1956, the facade of the Phillips was changed to suit the modern style of the times. Luckily for historic restoration, the modern facade was only skin deep, and did not impact the original building face. The City of Edmonton provided \$225,000 to help offset some of the costs of returning it to its original appearance.

The Phillips building contains 39 units. The loft building interior incorporated an elevator that would service only private residences and old vault rooms left over from a previous tenant. Brick walls have also been exposed where possible.

Shafraaz Kaba works at Manasc Isaac Architects Ltd., an architectural firm in Edmonton specializing in sustainable design. You can contact him at shafraaz@miarch.com.

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