

475 Brannan Street

San Francisco, California

PFAU ARCHITECTURE CATERS TO THE "HIPNESS FACTOR" AT DOT-COM COMPANIES THROUGH A HYBRID OF NEW AND EXISTING CONSTRUCTION.

By James S. Russell, AIA

Architect: Pfau Architecture—Peter Pfau, Dwight Long, Chris Tymoff, Brooks Dunn, Kit Gibbs, Casper Mork-Ulmes, Chris Schabacker, Mallory Shure, Keri Spiller, Michael Young, Sherin Yuan

Engineer: Steven Tipping & Associates (structural); Mazetti & Associates (mechanical, plumbing); F. W. Associates (electrical)

Consultants: Marta Fry Landscape Architects; Ferrari/Moe (waterproofing)

General Contractor: Swinerton & Walberg

Metal Fabricator: Hellikson Design & Manufacturing - Doug Hellikson

Signage: Appetite Engineers - Martin Venezky, Scott Oliver

Size: 320,000 square feet

Cost: \$24 million

Completion date: 2000

Sources

Built-up roofing: Malarkey Roofing Co.

Aluminum Windows: All Weather

Fire-control doors, security grilles: Cornell Iron Works

Locksets: Schlage

Resilient flooring: Forbo

Interior ambient lighting: Eliptipar, Capri

Downlights: Lithonia

Exterior lights: Eliptipar, Columbia, B-K Lighting

Elevators: Mitsubishi

Program

It is not glib to say that 475 Brannan Street has no program. Dot-com and multimedia tenants often sign on for a space based on its possibilities. Only rarely can such tenants accurately predict how much space they'll need by the time they move in. On a recent walk-through, architect Peter Pfau pointed to the still-empty space of an early tenant. The company had been sold twice since lease signing and was in the process of subletting part of its space.

Even though potential tenants may not know what they will do with a space, some aspects are a given: a regularly laid-out floor plate that offers a great deal of flexibility in configuration, ample power and telecommunication capacity, good light or views. The 1906 Baker and Hamilton warehouse building appealed for its well-detailed, substantial masonry construction and its relatively high-ceilinged, post-and-beam internal structure.

Solution

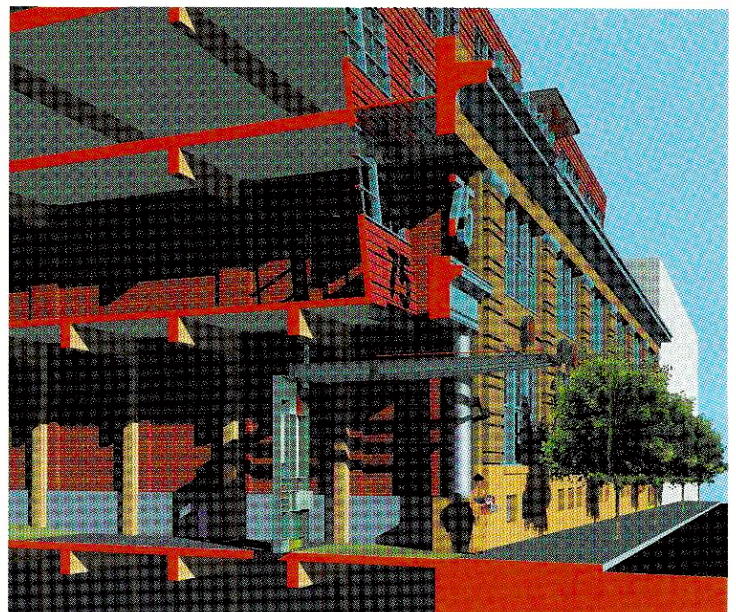
The building at 475 Brannan Street is the largest and most complex of several projects Pfau Architecture has done with SKS Investments—itsself a youthful firm targeting start-up tenants. Because the building had been built as a warehouse, it had adequate structural capacity for a lightweight addition. But first the building was seismically reinforced with what is called a propped

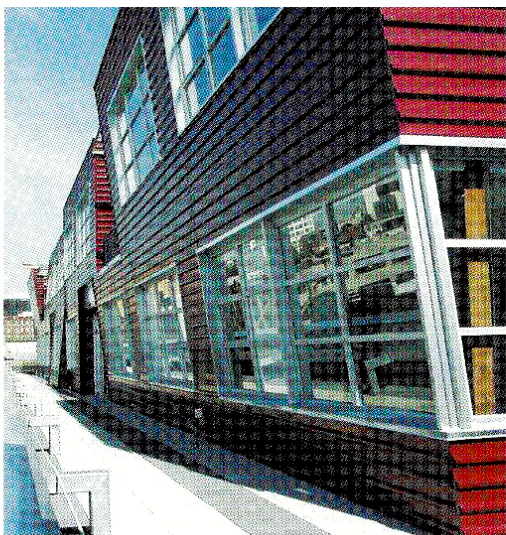
shear wall. Six of these recently developed devices were used. They consist of reinforced concrete piers bridged by a diagonal brace of full building height that is rigidly attached to each floor. (Substantial as these devices are, they are less costly and use less space than the conventional myriad braces and shear walls.)

What appears to be a line of freight cars clattering along the roof is actually a two-story addition. The stories were framed in heavy timber and light-gauge metal; the lightness of the construction made it possible to retain the framing of the existing building—enormous, irreplaceable wood columns and beams. The red-painted metal cladding tilts in and out to break down the block-long

length of the facade. The architects also added new utilities and exit stairs, including a stair that lands unenclosed in the lobby, thanks to an inventive reconfiguration of standard fire separations (requiring intensive building-official consultation).

The architects cut a new courtyard into the building, bringing daylight to almost the entire deep floor; the courtyard opens off the elevator lobbies, thus allowing everyone to share this precious oasis in the city's concrete desert. The long lobby from the street is lined with a "multimedia" wall that offers live-broadcast capability as it directs visitors to tenants. Underground, parked cars tuck in between old columns.





The tilts, setbacks, and cutouts of the two-story addition (above) offer a contextually savvy, industrial note as well as useful outdoor space.



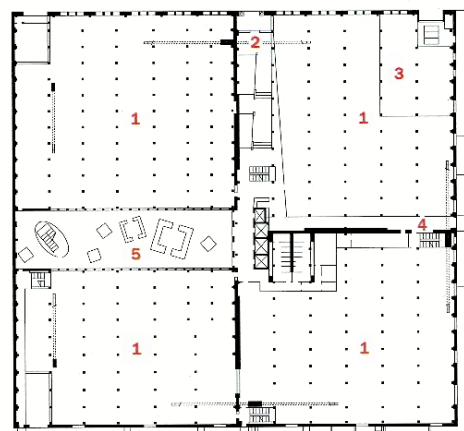


A media-ready wall in the lobby lets tenants electronically broadcast their products. A courtyard (awaiting landscaping) opens onto lobbies (with balconies, below) and offices.



Commentary

In only a couple of years, the Internet start-up client has gone from being a blip on the office-construction radar screen to a major force in office buildings and interiors. With their art- and design-savvy workforces, they are changing the rules of spec development. Pfau Architecture 475 Brannan deserves kudos for doing a lot with a little—and getting built at high speed. Yet it already portends troubling trends. The “loft look” threatens to become an Internet start-up cliché. Also, developers and tenants in this market will only rarely commission new construction of distinction, while lavishing enormous attention upon ordinary older buildings. Architects must respect the difficult real-estate constraints under which such companies operate, but talented architects are not often enough asked to do more than the *loft du jour*. ■



GROUND FLOOR

- 1. Tenant
- 2. Lobby
- 3. Retail
- 4. Delivery
- 5. Courtyard