Facts & Figures

Developer: The Beal Companies LLP, Boston, MA

Type of Project: Adaptive reuse of existing college buildings

Architect: CBT/Childs Bertman Tseckares, Inc., Boston, MA

General Contractors: Sea-Dar Construction, Boston, MA; Perini Corporation, Framingham, MA

Size: 24,000 square feet (residential and common space); 8,000 gross square feet (parking)

Construction Time: Completed in June 2004

The Need: To renovate and combine two existing residential brownstones

The Challenge: Ensuring the water tables did not fall too much and adding the underground parking

Supportive Team Members

Campbell-McCabe, Inc.
Doors, Frames, Hardware

Capital Elevator Corp.

Harry R. Feldman, Inc.
Land Surveyor

MegaStone, Inc./Stone Doctors

Poirier Sales & Service Corp.
Major Appliance Contractor

Save-On-Wall Co., Inc.
Drywall Subcontractor

Sherin and Lodgen LLP
Law Firm

U.S. Fire Prevention Inc.
Fire Prevention

SEA-DAR CONSTRUCTION
46 Waltham Street, *floor* 2A
Boston, MA 02118
617.423.0870
617.423.0872 *fax*
www.sea-dar.com

Photos courtesy of Roger Tuttle/CBT/Childs Bertman Tseckares, Inc.

Boston, Massachusetts

49-51 Commonwealth Avenue

When Beal Companies decided to reuse two existing Simmons College academic buildings in the Back Bay area, 49 and 51 Commonwealth Avenue, and combine them into one residential building, it called upon the expertise of Roger Tuttle, project manager for architect CBT/Childs Bertman Tseckares, Inc. Under his direction, craftsmen carefully labored to protect and preserve the two historic buildings.

The result is a single building that provides 24,000 square feet of residential and common space as well as an 8,000-gross-square-foot underground parking garage. The orientation of the brownstones commands a straightforward layout that places more public areas toward the street side and more private areas toward the rear or alley side. "The logic behind this layout is clear and easy to understand," said Tuttle.

"The plans incorporated the reuse and refinish of the existing main entry vestibule and the entry hall," he said. "Original mahogany columns, wainscoting, paneling and ceiling coffers were also preserved. Each residence also includes original fireplace mantles from the building, and within some of the units, original wood paneling and built-ins were restored and reused. Reuse of beautifully crafted details originally found within the building was important to everyone — the owner, the architect and the buyers."

Another important design driver was a concern for falling water tables. Due to the increase in additional paved and hard areas during the years, the team worried that a falling water table height would dry the wood piles supporting the buildings, causing them to rot — a condition that has been plaguing the Back Bay for many years. The solution was to redirect nearly all the water that falls on the site back into the soil either by direct contact or to drywells that leach the water back into the site, recharging the soil.




Photos courtesy of Roger Tuttle/CBT/Childs Bertman Tseckares, Inc.

Perhaps the project's greatest challenge, however, was adding the underground garage. With a street level of approximately 16 feet above sea level, the garage floor sits just a few inches above the water table. Consequently, shoring up the existing buildings and providing a temporary structure during the excavation was extensive, involving many hours of work and tons of steel invested in the buildings' existing masonry walls. "It was discovered that a number of wooden piles along one of the buildings' party walls had rotted," said Tuttle. "The rotted piles needed to be cut, dug around and cut off for new underpinning to support the existing masonry walls."

The team worked together to overcome these challenges. "I am proud that CBT was involved in the project," said Tuttle. "We were responsible for creating residences that are handsome and comfortable. In a greater context, the building remains a part of the urban fabric of Boston's Back Bay. We are proud to be a part of the renovation process and equally proud of our efforts in preserving a landmark building that will continue to represent Boston's history." ■

— Laura Carter