

Boston Translation

Boston's rich history is potently infused into its dense, bustling neighborhoods, where the same brick walls that once contained cobbler shops now house Internet startups. The adaptive reuse of these buildings forms a solid foundation for sustainable renovation.



It's hard to say whether the stucco- and-vinyl-clad houses popping up in suburbs today will still provide sturdy housing stock in the year 2160, but Boston's pre-Civil War brownstones suggest it's possible to stay strong for centuries. Of course, bricks and mortar have a good track record—a fact well known to Susan Battista and Fritz Klaetke, who purchased a South End row house in 2005 after six years living in another nearby.

Built in 1846, the live/work building lies one block off Washington Street, the original causeway leading into Boston. In standard developer style, the buildings in this area were erected together and all look alike, but you'd never denounce this as architectural monoculture. "Washington Street had piano factories and breweries, and you can see those existing buildings now developed into offices and condos," explains Klaetke. Echoing her husband's passion for their neighborhood, Battista adds, "Our street was where little tailors and button shops and hat stores would have been."

From one cottage industry to another, Battista and Klaetke set up their own businesses in the former storefront on the ground floor. Klaetke runs a three-person graphic design and branding firm, Visual Dialogue, alongside Battista's mostly solo market-research firm, Topic 101. They both love that the vertical orientation of the four-story, 1,900-square-foot building allows them to separate billable hours and downtime completely—a luxury they didn't have in their last space, where their seven-year-old daughter, Ava, was wont to doodle on client mockups, and the conference table performed double duty at dinner.

In the new place, each floor's function is complemented by the external environment. At ground level, the office feels urban, with the city's sounds and sights at close range. By the time you get to the fourth floor, the din dissipates and the windows frame tree-tops and the Boston skyline, "almost like a tree house," Battista notes.

These were the raw goods that sold the couple on their new space, but preparing it for occupancy took more

Susan Battista and Fritz Klaetke's corner office, one block from a busy Boston thoroughfare, satisfies their craving for action, but a peaceful retreat is just steps away.



work than they'd expected. Upon inspection they discovered drywall piled four layers deep, covering decades of water damage. "You can't say 'Time out' at that point," Klaetke concedes.

The couple enlisted the help of David Stern and Christine Gaspar of architecture firm Stern McCafferty, and planned a renovation that would be low on waste and high on sustainable features. Their first task was to tear out the kitchens on the first and third floors and install one on the second. Most of their demolition waste—fixtures, tiles, cabinets, sinks, even moldings—went to Craigslist foragers or the Boston Building Materials Co-op.

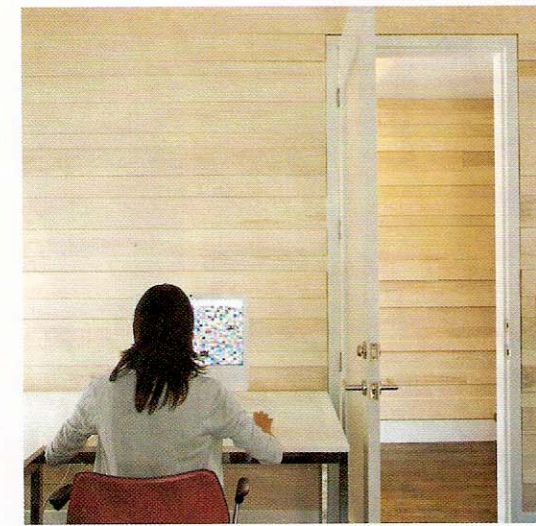
New additions included environmentally responsible choices like Energy Star appliances, insulated windows, and dual-flush toilets. They used white ash for the floors and many of the walls, all sourced from Massachusetts Woodlands Cooperative, a highly resourceful enterprise with a smart approach to forest management. Individual landowners with forested acreage join the co-op as member-suppliers, agreeing to become certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, and to provide their regular prunings to the co-op for sale as homegrown lumber. Because the harvests are limited and distributed, the wood comes from a combination of species in irregular widths and lengths. Battista and Klaetke embraced the randomness, creating three-dimensional wall surfaces by laying planks of varying

dimensions side by side.

With a continuous stairwell running through the four floors, the owners had an opportunity to utilize passive cooling with a whole-house fan installed in the fourth-floor ceiling that sucks hot air up and out, keeping temperatures down in summer. In colder weather, the house stays warm thanks to Icynene spray-foam insulation, which they chose for its nontoxic properties and its ability to fill the cracks and gaps typical of old brick structures. "I did a lot of research," says Klaetke, "and looked at recycled denim and other options, but all of them had issues with water seepage. Icynene wouldn't compact or mold, and it could totally fill the spaces." Battista concludes, "It's amazing to live in Boston with no drafts. The house is efficient and the heat bill is reduced."

With no off-gassing from behind the walls, it only made sense to cover the interior surfaces in substances free of noxious fumes or chemicals. Having a child in the house made indoor air quality even more important, so they prioritized low-VOC paints and natural finishes and sealants.

Even with all of these environmental details, Battista and Klaetke agree that the most sustainable aspect of the entire project was the reuse of an existing building in a dense urban center. "Doing that allowed us to do things like get rid of our car, use public transit, and bike," says Klaetke. "It's really nice to practice what we preach." ■



The winding stairwell (top) runs from the ground-floor offices (above) all the way to the top of the house, creating an airshaft for natural ventilation and passive cooling.



After the removal of two small kitchens from the original building, the home's new kitchen dominates the second floor, opening onto the living area.

Fixtures in the kitchen include 14 Series pendants by Omer Arbel for Bocci and Charles Ghost stools by Philippe Starck for Kartell. **3** p. 242

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