

Millennial Modern

Toronto's Element Group retrofits a 19th-century industrial building for commercial and residential use.



IN SOME RESPECTS, the Element Building recalls the architecture of certain streets in Rome, where ateliers or boutiques operate on street level, with living space above. With three floors of intimately scaled live/work space, the structure brings new life to a residential street in an Italian neighborhood of downtown Toronto. The Element Group, a firm of architects and designers, purchased and renovated the brick warehouse, making only modest changes to the exterior façade. They did remove the front portion of one wall to accommodate two entrances, one leading to the two upper floors and the other opening into the reception area of a ground-floor suite of offices. A set of concrete-block scissor stairs was constructed in the center of the 7,000-sq.-ft. building to comply with local building code requirements. Original parking spaces at the front of the building were transformed into an appropriately scaled garden entrance, and all units have access to a rooftop garden.

The ground floor is a long, narrow, 2,200-sq.-ft. space stretching back from the glazed front of the building, which houses a boardroom exposed to the street. The architects took full advantage of the building's potential drawbacks—specifically, its length and narrowness. →

Opposite: The renovation of the Element Building included creating a new ground-floor entrance and boardroom exposed to the street.

Above: Glazed boardroom on polished concrete floor, with Louis XIV armchair and "Colonna Antonina," an original 18th-century Italian copper engraving by Piranesi.

PHOTOGRAPHY: STEVEN S. MIRIC

They exaggerated the slender perspective by introducing an unbroken corridor that draws visitors into the space while servicing a sequence of rooms: bathroom, kitchen, private meeting space, and studio, terminating in a bamboo garden at the rear.

The crystalline boardroom, floating on a bed of polished concrete, acts as a public introduction to the building. Reportedly inspired by Jean Nouvel's Cartier Foundation in Paris, the glazing also echoes the horizontal plane of rectangular glass on the Norman Foster boardroom table. A Piranesi copper engraving, mounted horizontally, again emphasizes the building's length. The current vogue of combining antique and contemporary furnishings and art is given eloquent expression here: the delicate legs of original Louis XIV armchairs resonate with the graceful steel legs of the Nomos table. Other furnishings include a 19th-century Korean rain drum, now used as a coffee table, placed in front of a Louis XIV settee upholstered in white Ultrasuede. A minimal, louvered glass screen separates reception and boardroom.

Milosh Pavlovicz, one of the Element Group partners, poetically suggests that the sensuous rebirth of this 19th-century warehouse is an exercise in "the archeology of memory." Sasha Josipovicz, another partner, concludes that the project is not unlike "a barefoot contessa." The sensitive renovation has resulted in a building that is at once quiet and demure, yet replete with creative energy.

—Kelly Rude



FIRST FLOOR



Left: A narrow corridor services several rooms to the right, culminating in a bamboo garden at rear of building. Private meeting room is furnished with Le Corbusier table and Plank chairs.

Opposite: Boardroom with Eames Aluminum Group chairs, Norman Foster table, Louis XIV armchair, and custom glass screen offering a view into the reception area.

LOUIS XIV ARMCHAIR AND SETTEE: L'ANTAN. KOREAN RAIN DRUM: ARTIFACTS. FOSTER NOMOS TABLE: TECNO. EAMES CHAIRS: VITRA. AERON CHAIR: HERMAN MILLER. PLANK CHAIR: ICF GROUP. LE CORBUSIER TABLE: PALAZZETTI. CUSTOM GLASS SCREEN: DALCO & RECON. LIGHTING: MIKE NOOREINI. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: ELEMENT GROUP.