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THE MAGAZINE OF RECORD FOR ARCHITECTURAL GLASS INDUSTRY LEADERS

Volume 58  
Issue 4  
April 2023

## School Safety

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# Aging Gracefully

## Working on Retrofit and Renovation Projects



“Preserving and restoring an existing building reduces waste and provides a greener alternative than discarding old materials.”

**M**ost buildings don’t age gracefully. Without professional help, they just don’t. I’ve seen and worked on my fair share of buildings that need facelifts to restore them to their former glory. There are many valid reasons to perform renovations and it’s a challenge our company loves.

Renovations add value to buildings and typically cost less than new construction. Similarly, retrofitting adds new elements to a structure, including equipment, technology or systems that improve the building.

### Benefits of Renovation

The costs to renovate a building can be significant, but there are important potential benefits once complete. Renovating or retrofitting a building with strong structural integrity but outdated exteriors and interiors can:

- Increase commercial value, comfort and functionality;
- Be transformed or adapted for a new or different use;
- Maintain its historical authenticity while upgrading its operational systems or environmental performance;
- Offer its occupants an updated space in less time, with fewer disruptions, and at a lower cost than it would take to build new;
- Meet new requirements and building codes.

The immediate advantage of renovation versus demolition and new construction is that the building already exists, often resulting

in a more sustainable approach, saving cost, time and energy. Preserving and restoring an existing building reduces waste and provides a greener alternative to discarding old materials. There is no question that a retrofit also can significantly improve the energy performance of older buildings.

### Challenges in Renovation

We have learned to watch for certain pitfalls in these projects, starting with complicated construction decisions. There are always unforeseen challenges; we never know what issues we might find once work begins. Having worked on many of these projects, we’ve discovered that the best way to reduce these challenges is to work hand-in-hand with the general contractor (GC), architect, project manager, vendors and especially the property owner. We can reduce or eliminate coordination issues by developing a functional installation plan in which everyone gains control over the schedule, accuracy and quality for each phase of the project.

Relying on the knowledge of seasoned field veterans and long-time partners is the best way to solve challenges as they emerge.

Verifying existing codes and assessing current conditions aren’t as simple as reviewing documents. Inspecting the site physically is critical to ensure that existing structures can support new products. Something as seemingly simple as integrating a new door or window system with existing systems can lead to complications. Finished older buildings that were “grandfathered in” do not always allow for accommodating new building standards.

Your choice of partner in this niche of specialty work is as important as your decision to perform the job. Dedicated partners who can turn challenges into reality will help create unique designs and repair or delay the damage that takes place over time.

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### Checklist of Pitfalls

Commonly-encountered challenges can hinder a renovation project. Make sure that:

- ✓ The structure is sound and can support extra loads;
- ✓ The existing building is compatible with building codes;
- ✓ Plans meet environmental standards for lead, asbestos, mold and ease of abatement;
- ✓ Matching materials can be sourced and procured;
- ✓ The budget will cover the required work; and
- ✓ Critical communication with stakeholders takes place before construction.

➔ **Nataline Lomedico** is the president and CEO of Giroux Glass, headquartered in Los Angeles. The company has been in business since 1946.