

Green meets history in annex

Building said to be on cutting edge

By Anthony Flint
GLOBE STAFF

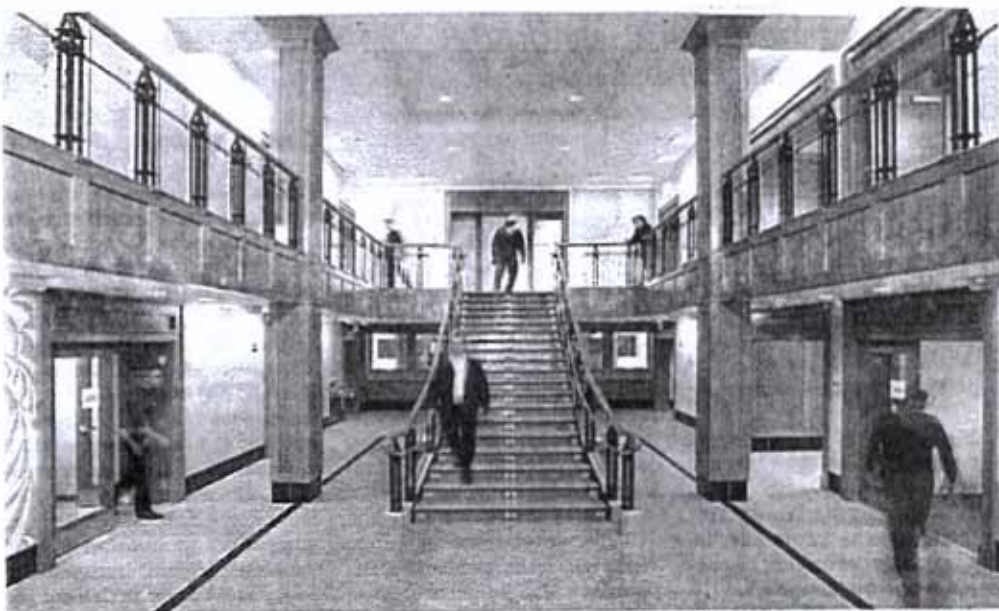
If specialization in architecture seems a bit like a Starbucks menu these days, then the refurbished City Hall Annex in Cambridge is a mocha coconut frappuccino: It's a green historic restoration.

A Sense of Place

Some explanation is in order. Green building has swept through the profession in recent years — the use of recycled and nontoxic materials, solar or thermal heating, natural sunlight, and natural ventilation so that buildings have a minimal impact on the planet. Historic preservation has been a keystone for much longer; in the wake of modernism, more communities have seen the value of turn-of-the-century structures that fit humanely into the urban fabric and have interior and exterior details that are deemed worth saving.

The City Hall Annex, also known as 57 Inman St., also known as the McCusker Building, and also known as the Harvard School (built in 1870, rebuilt following a fire in 1899), combines the two movements. William R. Hammer, principal at HKT Architects Inc. of Somerville, which took over the \$7 million renovation from David Perry, said it's the first green rehab of a historic building in Massachusetts, and it may be the first in the country, at least since there's been a formal green rating system in place.

It wasn't all that hard to make the five-story, 33,216-square-foot building — best known to Cambridge residents as the place to pay parking tickets — a model of green building. The Victorians gave Hammer and his team a pretty good head start. The roots of green building probably extend at least as far back as Stonehenge, but the Victorians were adept at maximizing natural sunlight and



The new double-height lobby at City Hall Annex features murals by artist Mike Glier.



Green building at City Hall annex means low-emitting materials, carbon dioxide monitoring, and windows that open (left), but the design maintained the familiar exterior of the structure.

ventilation. Those big windows were never meant to be sealed and locked in favor of air conditioning.

That said, City Hall Annex was a complete gut job. The building had a bad mold infestation and was evacuated in 1999. HKT rebuilt the entire interior with skylights and glass office walls so sunlight can reach deep inside. Energy-efficient systems include hidden solar panels on the roof, a ground source heat pump, and auto-shutoff lights. The building has low-emitting paints, adhesives, and carpets; the maple and cherry in interior spaces came from a forest where sustainable practices are used; and 80 percent of the construction waste was recycled. The project is shooting for a gold and minimally a silver rating under the US Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification system.

Hammer seems equally proud of the renovated grand entry hall

(on the Broadway side, not off Inman Street now), the public art by Mike Glier, and the careful restoration of the brick parapets, shorn in the 1950s. The green and the historic clashed only once, he said, when it would have been easier to put the rooftop photovoltaic panels on a 45-degree angle and not worry if they could be seen from the street.

The building's presentation to the street is crisp and stately, although natural ventilation means those big Victorian windows will be opened in spring, summer, and fall, and the bronze-colored screens are jarring; better to have gone with black or something to make the wire mesh disappear.

Cambridge is starting to be a real capital for green building. Just down Broadway, the new Genzyme headquarters at Kendall Square is in line for a platinum LEED rating. Boston has also caught the wave, with the Manu-

life office building on the South Boston waterfront. That building has an inner and outer skin to promote natural ventilation — though the greenest thing about that building is that the Silver Line runs right under it.

But with the City Hall Annex — which welcomed back the exiled animal commission, Parking Department, community development, and arts offices last Tuesday and has a grand opening celebration slated for this Thursday — the city has broken through to the next level. And what with all the old factories and warehouses that could be both restored to their former glory and made environmentally friendly, a plain old historic rehab job may soon be like ordering a large black from your barista.

Got a place in mind? Anthony Flint can be reached at flint@globe.com.