

Coollest Office Spaces: Marian Development preserves firehouse's character

Business First of Louisville - by [Jacqui Boyle](#) Assistant Editor

Jacob L. Brown, principal of Marian Development Group LLC, said ghosts of firefighters-past visit the second floor of the business' office where he is shown at right. Marian Development Group operates in a historic firehouse built in 1883. It was converted into office space by a previous tenant. The business acquired the property and redesigned the interior to house its office, modernizing the space while also maintaining the historic character of the building. Offices and a meeting space on the first floor are in operation, and the business plans renovation work on the second floor of its space, which use to be a place where firefighters would sleep, eat and use the fire pole, shown in the photo behind Brown, to quickly exit when responding to a fire.

Brown said he expects a new office space and kitchen to be complete on the second floor by the summer of 2015. Brown said his main goal for the project was to accentuate the historic character of the building while also modernizing it by making it open with a lot of glass and adding features including electronics. "I had seen it a number of times," Brown said of the building. "It's one of those buildings you pass by and say, 'It would be really cool to do something to that.'"

Preserving the old

One of Brown's goals for the office space design was to preserve the original historic facade of the building. He used old photos of the firehouse to recreate the original firehouse front doors, shown above. "We hand-built those here on site," Brown said. The other exterior features of the building, including the windows and doors, were preserved. "I'm a big proponent of historic buildings," he said. "So we definitely wanted to keep the historic character as much as possible."

A new use for an old part

Marian Development Group renovated the former Stoddard Johnston Elementary School as it transitioned to the Stoddard Johnston Scholar House. During the renovation work, Brown was in an old boiler room in the school and had an idea of how to use the big sliding door that was used to enter the room. "I saw that, and I said, 'This is going to work perfect ... for our conference table,'" Brown said. "Everybody said, 'You're crazy.'" Brown added a base and glass on top for a smooth surface and successfully converted the door into a new, silver conference table for his business. The table is a combination of the modern with stainless-steel legs and the old — just like the building itself.

Mapping the past

A hand-painted street map of Louisville hangs in the business' hallway on the first floor. The map was used in the firehouse by firefighters who needed to find out where they were headed to put out flames. "If they needed to know where they were going, they looked at the map," Brown said. "There weren't GPS's or any of that sort of stuff. ... You don't throw things like that away — absolutely not."

Jacqui Boyle manages the special publications and labeled content. She is the primary contact for Viewpoint, Strategies and DateBook submissions.