



WOHLSEN

CONSTRUCTION

901 Market Tower Case Study

Once considered Wilmington’s first “skyscraper,” the original six-story masonry building at 901 North Market Street was first constructed in 1892. Subsequent additions in the early 1900s added the seventh, eighth, and ninth stories. Renovations to the building and a 14-story addition were added in the late 1950s, along with a metal façade over the original masonry. Over the years, it has gone by the names of *The Equitable Building*, *The Bank of Delaware*, and today it is known as *Market Tower*. The new renovations and upgrades have transformed the property into a contemporary mixed-used building that provides multiple retail spaces along with artfully constructed apartments in the heart of Downtown Wilmington.

The Westover Companies purchased the property with the initial intent of renovating the building for office space. Ultimately they determined the demand for apartments in Wilmington better suited the space. Construction of the \$30 million dollar re-purposing of the building into a full-service apartment complex with retail and commercial space on the first floor began in 2021. The renovation included major façade upgrades to give the building a more contemporary look while still maintaining its historical aspect. There are now 82 units total that include studio, 1-bedroom, and 2-bedroom apartments.





An adaptive reuse project such as this often presents unique conditions when the existing layers of the structure are uncovered. In this case, there was the additional challenge of multiple renovations and additions that had been added over the years, some over 60 years after the original structure was built. These major additions usually consisted of different construction methods and materials that needed to be married together, often on a floor-by-floor basis. This required a dynamic relationship between Wohlsen, the client and the design team, led by Dever Architects, to address these challenges head-on and develop unique, timely, and cost-effective solutions. One example is the addition of the 10th floor rooftop deck. The investigative demolition of the lower floors revealed insufficient support for the proposed deck. The team developed innovative solutions to not only address the situation but also to keep the project on schedule.

Investigation of the existing conditions can sometimes uncover unexpected features of the original construction that can be incorporated into the new design. In this case, there were existing structural brick arches discovered behind walls that were able to be left exposed as part of the new apartment finishes. Other features included the reuse of bank deposit boxes, mailboxes, cast iron columns/steelwork, and other historical features. An old air shaft and an adjacent floor-high steel truss were transformed into a two-story atrium in the center of the building which included a massive skylight.

One of the biggest challenges to a large scale, urban renovation project such as this, is the lack of space. Parking, staging, and laydown areas are practically non-existent. Constant communication with the team, subcontractors, and city officials was paramount to keep construction running smoothly with minimal impact to traffic and the surrounding businesses and properties. Debris removal and material delivery schedules had to be strictly coordinated due to the lack of space and storage.

Conducting construction activities during the COVID-19 pandemic presented its own unique challenges, not the least of which was the industry-wide supply chain issues and material delivery delays. Strict adherence to safety protocols provided a safe work environment for all personnel and extensive coordination with suppliers and subcontractors kept the project on schedule and on budget.



"The repurposing of this historic property, which will soon be filled with new residents to support the many small businesses on and around Market Street and bring new energy to the Downtown District, is just one more indication of the great things happening all around our City each and every day." Mike Purzycki, Mayor of Wilmington, DE