the PORTLAND BUILDING

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Newly renovated Portland Building situated in the heart of Portland, Oregon

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

PREFACE

The Portland Building stands out among the buildings of downtown Portland, Oregon as a postmodern collage of historical references and symbols. This colorful and spirited addition to the city was designed by Michael Graves and built in 1982 as administrative offices for the City of Portland. Despite international recognition for its groundbreaking design, it faced problems with its structure, exterior, and operational systems that repairs alone could not overcome.

By 2016, the 400,000 SF Portland Building had reached a point where it needed to address performance issues and adapt to better suit how the City of Portland wanted to support its employees and engage with the public. Long-standing water intrusion issues paired with poor thermal performance and a lack of access to daylight and views had created constant maintenance dilemmas and an unpleasant interior environment. The resulting Portland Building Reconstruction project consisted of a complete renovation/restoration of the original building including new exterior cladding, seismic upgrade, MEP systems replacement, and new interior workplace.

Completed in December of 2019, the Portland Building Reconstruction project sought to carefully balance respect for the historic design with sound technical solutions to help the building evolve and create a healthy, productive workplace for city employees and an open, welcoming space for community members.

This book tells the evolving story of the Portland Building, honoring the history of the building and documenting the expanding human experience of all who enter through its doors in the future.

Newly renovated Portland Building situated in the heart of Portland, Oregon

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

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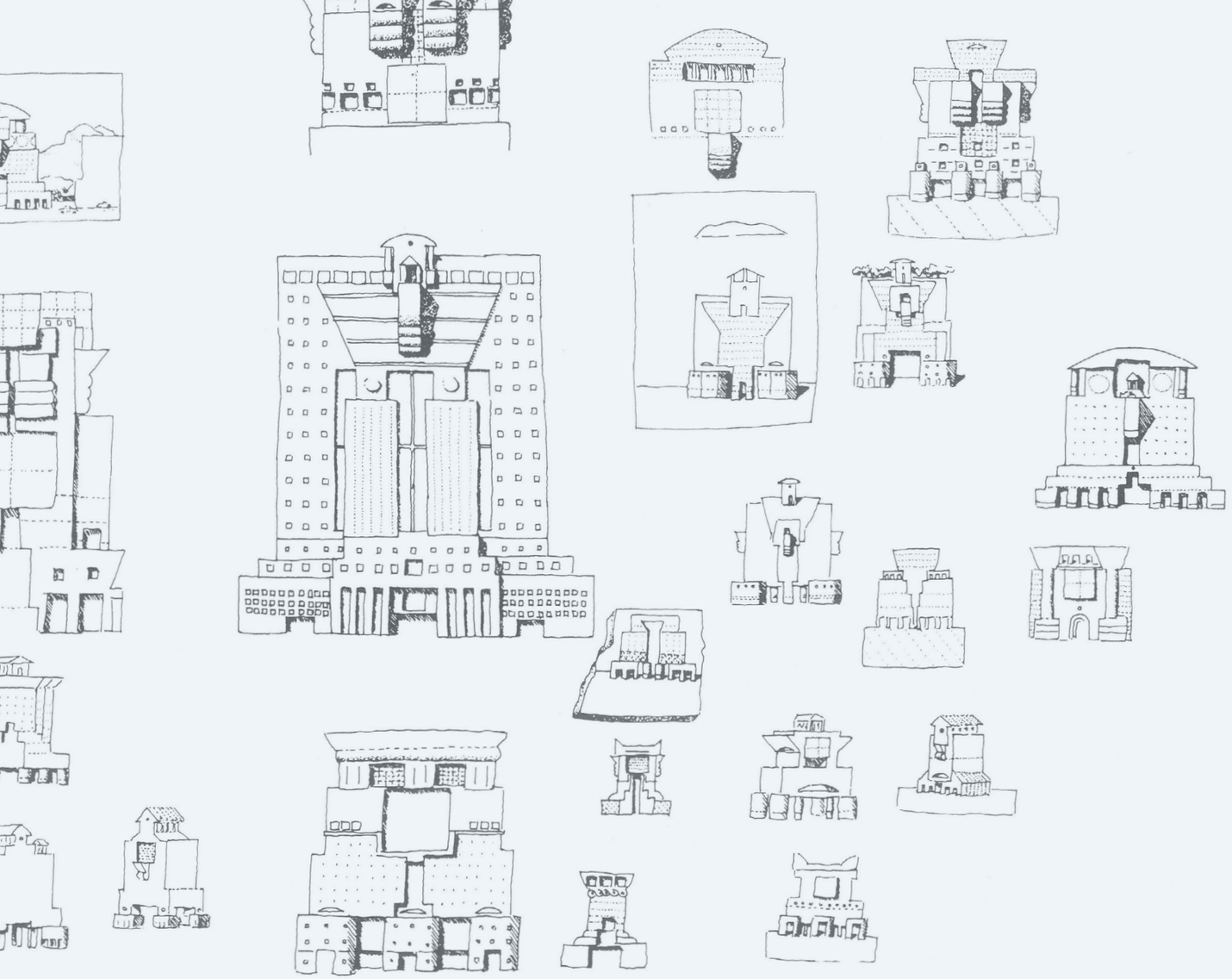


CHAPTER 1:

A HISTORY OF *the* PORTLAND BUILDING

When the City of Portland formally announced a design competition for a municipal office building on November 9, 1979, world architecture was in the beginnings of a sea-change. Much of the 20th century had seen modernism reign supreme. Yet in the 1970s, a young generation of architects began to challenge modernism with new ideas and approaches. Why can't buildings reference the historical past? What's wrong with a little color and whimsy?

With a reverence for classical style and a pop-art influenced sense of irony, postmodern architecture was impossible to ignore, even though initially the projects were mostly just houses. Then along came the Portland Building, a 15-story municipal office outfitted almost like a birthday present. There were huge fiberglass façade ribbons, painted pilasters, oversized keystones, a grid of tiny windows, and the second largest statue in America perched over its entrance.

When the Portland Public Services Building (as it was originally known) opened in 1982, it "launched Graves's career and rejuvenated Portland's image," writes architectural historian Meredith Clausen.

Images courtesy Michael Graves Architecture & Design

"It also placed postmodernism at the forefront of architectural discourse." The Portland Building was a media sensation, featured in publications like The New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Time, and Newsweek.

It is no exaggeration, argues critic Karrie Jacobs, to say the Portland Building "changed the broad perception of architecture as much as Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum Bilbao did 15 years later." Charles Jencks, in his book *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, calls the Portland Building "the first major monument" of postmodernism, "because with all its faults it still is the first to show that one can build with art, ornament, and symbolism on a grand scale, and in a language the inhabitants understand."

Architect Principal Carla Weinheimer of DLR Group, who led the Portland Building redesign team, was a graduate student at the University of Virginia School of Architecture when the Portland Building opened in 1982. "This building was an incredible thing to show up on the scene," she says, "because we'd been going through years and years of a formal and somewhat engineering-like approach to design: very much the form-follows-function thing. Michael Graves was able to achieve something so radical; it's now hard to understand how radical it was. Somehow he was able to reintroduce—and this was what it was all about at the time—the full range of the language of architecture. It's the idea that a window is not just functionally an opening in a wall: it's a thing that has meaning beyond that. That there are so many more pieces and parts to what the traditional historic architecture did in terms of language, of form. We were so excited about it! Because Graves was opening up a whole new range of thinking about how to do design work."

MODERNISM

Over the course of the 20th century, modernism took root in the 1930s and has endured as a dominant architectural style.

Examples of modernist architecture include the following:

Empire State Building, architect Shreve, Lamb & Harmon, photograph by Victor Larracuente (Pexels)

Villa Savoye, architect Le Corbusier, photograph by Renato Saboya (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Falling Water, architect Frank Lloyd Wright, photograph by Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress #LC-DIG-highsm-04261

The rise of modernism in Portland after World War II accompanied one of the city's biggest economic booms. In 1947, the Pietro Belluschi-designed Equitable Building earned distinction as the first office building in the country with a glass and metal curtainwall. In the 1960s, the Portland office of Chicago and New York-based Skidmore, Owings and Merrill—the nation's preeminent designer of the midcentury American office building—produced landmarks like the Standard Plaza office building and Memorial Coliseum. 1970's Forecourt Fountain (now the Keller Fountain), by landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, was called "the best urban space since the Renaissance" by New York Times critic Ada-Louise Huxtable. Yet by this time, cracks were appearing in modernism's dominance locally and internationally, for both aesthetic and social reasons. Halprin's design was part of the South Auditorium urban renewal district, which had wiped away an immigrant neighborhood in South Portland, part of a wave of such inner-city projects nationwide. The completion of Portland's tallest building, the First National Bank Tower in 1972, (today the Wells Fargo Center), also drew as much criticism as praise. With America's middle class largely decamped to the suburbs, downtown seemed to be losing its vitality and human scale.

POSTMODERNISM AND MICHAEL GRAVES

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the dominance of modern architecture—now in its brutalist phase, with an emphasis on concrete and decreasing levels of transparency—finally began to crack. A younger generation, first in the press and academia, then in a succession of small projects, began demonstrating a new style, full of historical references, color and whimsy. Two books by American architect Robert Venturi—1966's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* and 1972's *Learning From Las Vegas*—acted as manifestos. Venturi extolled the virtues of classical Greco-Roman architecture, but also celebrated the ordinary architecture of the American cities and towns, and how the automobile age had made signage and symbolism key.

In the 1970s, creative irreverence began to reign with landmarks like Paris's Pompidou Centre (1971) by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, which placed its mechanical ducts and stairways on the exterior. As the decade continued, while architects like Robert A.M. Stern argued for a dignified neo-historic style, while others, like architect Charles Moore, used historical references with a more exuberantly, exaggerated flair. Graves, before gaining fame with the Portland Building, was first celebrated in the early 1970s as a member of the New York Five, a group of architects including Richard Meier, Peter Eisenman, Charles Gwathmey, and John Hejduk who were featured in the 1972 book *Five Architects* and united by a desire to take modernism into a new era.

Born in 1934 in Indianapolis, Graves earned a bachelor of architecture degree at the University of Cincinnati in 1958 and a master's from Harvard University the following year. He spent a year working for legendary industrial designer George Nelson, who would come to influence Graves's later career as a product designer. But he was impacted most of all by the two years spent in Italy from 1960-62 at the American Academy in Rome. It's where Graves's lifelong love of classical architecture was seeded.

Returning home, he was hired as a Princeton University architecture professor in 1962 and opened his architectural practice two years later. In the late 1970s, Graves transitioned more fully to postmodernism, which enabled what he considered a more humanist, human-scaled approach. After a succession of residential projects, his first noteworthy larger design came in a competition entry for the Fargo-Moorhead Cultural Center Bridge in 1977, full of bold, oversized references to classical forms.

One of the many models created as part of the design shows the evolution of Graves's design.

Image courtesy Michael Graves Architecture & Design

THE COMPETITION

A municipal office building for City of Portland staff had been proposed as far back as 1911, but never constructed. Instead, agencies were scattered across downtown in rented offices. The financial case for a city-owned office building was thus easy to make, and in anticipation, a full block site immediately north of City Hall was acquired. Mayor Neil Goldschmidt wanted the building to be an architectural landmark that would draw attention to the city.

Designs by Arthur Erickson (top) and Mitchell Giurgola (bottom) were also selected as competition finalists.

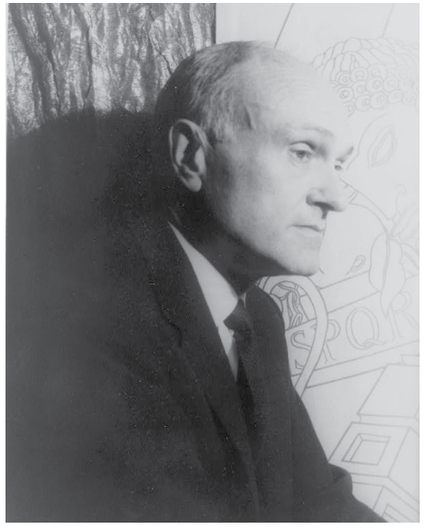
Photo (top): Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal

Photo (bottom): Mitchell/Girugola Collection, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania

Yet he and other city leaders were worried about the political backlash that could come from any cost overruns. One of the mayor's staff members suggested a design-build delivery method, which would guarantee the project's completion with a set budget and completion date, with any delays or cost overruns borne by the building team. At the same time, the city council member charged with overseeing the project, Frank Ivancie, set the budget at 90 percent of the current market rate for speculative downtown buildings. This, as much as its bold style, would come to define the Portland Building.

To plan and oversee the project, the City of Portland turned to architect Edward Wundram who recommended a design competition to attract the nation's top talent. Wundram drew up a request for qualifications and set a July 3, 1979 deadline for entries. A jury was chosen, with internationally-renowned architect Philip Johnson as its advisor. Known originally for designing modernist landmarks such as 1949's Glass House in Connecticut and as the Museum of Modern Art's first curator of architecture, Johnson had in recent years embraced postmodernism.

The Portland Building design competition attracted hundreds of applicants, which were narrowed to three finalists: Vancouver, Canada architect Arthur Erickson, New York's Mitchell Giurgola, and Graves, the last of whom was clearly Johnson's favorite. To make up for the young architect's inexperience with a building of this scale, Johnson even suggested Graves team up with architecture firm Emery Roth & Sons, which had designed many New York office towers. Graves, unlike his two larger-firm competitors, had to grow his office fast, so he turned to his Princeton students. "I graduated in June of '79 and immediately started working for him in that office," recalls Lisa Lee Morgan, today a longtime Charlotte-area architect. "He had never had a major commission of this size or type, but Michael knew he would have a chance, because Johnson was sympathetic to the evolution of Michael's work from modernist into postmodern. I think Johnson was curious about what Michael might do with a major commission." Wundram advised Graves that to win the job, he had to stay under the $22.4 million budget. "Michael knew that if he offered one shred of practical reason why they might reject his submission, they would take it," Morgan says, "because awarding the contract to such an unusual design was a risk." And staying under budget was no easy task. "That winter we would design something, [general contractors] Pavarini and Hoffman Construction would price it, it would come in over budget and Michael would say, 'We've got to cut this.' We'd argue with him: 'Nobody can come in under budget. Nobody else will.'



AIA Gold Medalist and Pritzker Prize laureate, Phillip Johnson acted as the jury advisor for the design competition and was an early proponent of postmodernism.

Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Carl Van Vechten Collection, [reproduction number, e.g., LC-USZ62-54231]

But Michael stuck to his guns. He said to me over and over, 'Lisa, you've got to make sure that every dot of an I and every cross of a T is in this program.'" The three finalist-firms' proposals were made public before an overflowing crowd in Portland's city hall in February 1980. Johnson quickly summed up three designs. Erickson's 12-story building with its ground floor open on the park side he called "a classic glass box," while the Mitchel/Giurgola proposal, a 10-story granite-clad building with beveled corners and a multistory interior lobby, was "the donut." The Graves proposal, which Johnson hailed as "the temple," was for a 15-story building after rising from a tile-clad base and covered arcade, with a stucco façade punctuated by a grid of square, three-

by-three-foot windows. Just as importantly, it was colorful: what Clausen refers to as "muted Tuscan blues, warm terracottas, and creamy beige." Its painted pilasters were affixed fiberglass garlands on two sides, while its columns bore oversized keystones, and perhaps most uniquely of all, on the roof were a series of small pavilions that Graves likened to a Mediterranean village. "When public comments began, Pietro Belluschi was the first to speak, and specifically criticized the Graves project, suggesting its cladding and garlands were better suited for "a large jukebox or beribboned Christmas gift." But another significant local architect defended the postmodern design: Willard Martin, whose Pioneer Courthouse Square design two years later also channeled classical architecture. In his testimony Martin called Graves "a serious, dedicated artist and architect." City Council did not select a winner that February night, instead agreeing to give both Graves and Erickson a chance to refine their designs according to client specifications, in what amounted to a second competition. While Erickson's design was subject to modest change request, they had a long list for Graves: to abandon the planned use of stucco in favor of simple painted concrete, and remove garlands on its façade, as well as the rooftop pavilions and the large interior stairway at the entrance.

Michael Graves (right) and Lisa Lee Morgan (left) at the Portland Building site during construction circa 1980.

Photograph courtesy Michael Graves Architecture & Design

On April 2, Erickson and Graves each personally made their final proposals. "As we have moved from the primary identity of the machine, as it is expressed in buildings, we are at last returning to the identity of the human being as it is seen in classicism," Graves said. "That it is an enormous

ART, COMMERCE AND PLANE TICKETS

In anticipation of the Portland Building's opening, Michael Graves decided to bring his entire staff west to celebrate. But his small firm couldn't afford the cost. At Lisa Lee Morgan's suggestion, Graves and his staff collaborated on a series of artworks that were sold at a New York gallery to underwrite the travel. It was no stretch for the team, which had created elaborate gift-wrapped boxes to hold Graves's Portland Building competition entry. This time, "I thought what if he does one of his fabulous collages, and we could make 30 little frames for them with wood dowels? He can put his own special unique brush strokes on each one. So that's what we did the whole week before the opening. We became a factory for producing these collages. I still have mine. We produced not only enough to sell but for each team member to have one. To include everyone was really important to us: to celebrate the whole team."

The sale of collages, hand made by staff at Michael Graves's office, funded their trip to the Portland Building grand opening celebration.

Photograph courtesy Michael Graves Architecture & Design

break with the tradition that has been called Modernism for the past fifty years. There is an argument outside, not on this street necessarily, but in the world today, about the direction of architecture. You find yourselves very interestingly in the middle of it." That night City Council finally decided on Michael Graves and his team. Construction was to begin in July of 1980. But after seeing many of the unique ornamental details of the building disappear, Graves had one more unpleasant surprise. After issuing a separate request for proposals for the building's interior design (excluding public areas like the lobby), the City of Portland chose local firm Zimmer Gunsul Frasca over Graves.

CONSTRUCTION AND OPENING

That summer, Michael Graves reached a new level of stardom, as design press around the world featured the Portland Building: not just design magazines but daily newspaper, magazine, books and articles. A drawing of the project was featured at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 1980, and featured on the cover of Jenks's book *Post-Modern Classicism: The New Synthesis*. Construction proceeded without incident, and the structure topped in July 1981. Through construction, some changes were made. The clear glass windows were changed to a heavily tinted black glass to address energy concerns, but Graves also saw one of the building's signature architectural features restored. After Frank Ivancie defeated interim-mayor Connie McCready in the race for mayor that May, he asked Graves to draw new façade garlands: this time a flattened version. But even before the building officially opened in October 1982, design and construction flaws were apparent. City employees moving in decried the lack of natural light due to the darkened glass. By December of 1981, over $1 million in change-orders had accrued.

"Quite honestly, a few of us were quite surprised to see how cheaply it was executed," says Patrick Burke, who had joined Graves's firm during construction. "For example, Michael said, 'The black glass was a big mistake. We're never doing it again.' It was really a shocking building at the time, but Michael knew there were flaws in certain ways. That building is something that he's had to own for the rest of his career."

The ground-floor loggias were one example of failed design aspirations. Two restaurants that originally signed on as tenants quickly left, as did a B. Dalton bookstore. "The original intent was to make it pedestrian friendly. So many of the 60s and 70s urban buildings were building these urban plazas," Burke explains. "Michael said, 'The building should come out to meet the street, but we also want to be pedestrian friendly so we'll create this loggia that will get filled out with shops. We'll make it deeper for tables and chairs, and people can sit out there and eat, but they'll be covered from the rain. It wound up being filled with bike racks instead.'" The façade material was, to put it kindly, a pragmatic choice and the third option. "Michael wanted to do a glazed terracotta tile. He found this company in northern California that could produce it, and Michael was so excited about it. He thought it was going to be this sparkly building in a rainy climate. Then the contractors told Michael it's not going to happen because of budget. So he said, 'We'll use stucco.' The City of Portland pushed back. They didn't want to accept stucco. They said, 'We don't want a building we'll have to repair every five to seven years.' Michael said, 'What can I use that's cheaper than stucco?' On a Sunday morning they called Michael with an idea. The contractor said, 'We could save money by making the façade the structure, and we'll just paint it.' But that's the problem: you get places where the concrete has failed and tile's come off. It's just not an ideal building wrapper. It doesn't keep out the weather very well. Michael said, 'I don't care if we make it out of oatmeal.' Michael's intent was shapes,

colors. In truth, Michael loved working with nice materials when we had higher budgets. But he was also very quick to do what he needed to do to be within budgets, and he didn't usually fight material changes."

THE MICHAEL GRAVES LEGACY

After the building opened, Graves went on to become one of the most prolific and prominent architects of his time. In fact, as important as the Portland Building commission was, it wasn't the only important opening Graves had in 1982. From the moment his 1980 competition entry for the Portland Building had gone public, it had been bringing work to his firm. Within months of the Portland Building, Graves's San Juan Capistrano library opened, as did his first skyscraper: the Humana Building in Louisville, which has been called the finest building of his career.

At the same time, the Portland Building's problems gave the architect a bitter taste of backlash. "In the final analysis, while Michael Graves is lionized in the rest of the country," an Oregon Magazine article warned, "he'll be ducking tomatoes in Portland for a long time to come." Clearly Graves got the message. Even 32 years later, when the architect returned to the city for a public interview in 2014 at the Portland Art Museum, less than a year before his death, he made a joke referencing the article. "I think it's nice to be here," Graves told interviewer Randy Gragg as the talk began. "I saw some people outside selling tomatoes. I have no idea what that meant." Behind the joking, there was real hurt. "I don't experience this anyplace else," Graves added. "I've done 350 building designs. And I don't have this controversy anywhere else. This is interesting to me. Usually I'm welcomed with a 25-year award or keys to the city." But by the time of his 2014 return to Portland, Graves had enjoyed a prolific career that was not limited to architecture.

Michael Graves addresses the audience (right) at the dedication of the Portland Public Service Building October 2, 1982.

(Also pictured Portland Mayor Frank Ivancie front row right)

Photograph courtesy Michael Graves Architecture & Design

Throughout the 1980s and 90s, Graves and his firm designed a multitude of high profile buildings that solidified his star status in the world of architecture. Not long afterward, the lifetime achievement awards began coming. In 1999, Graves received the National Medal of Arts from President Bill Clinton. In 2001, he was given the American Institute of Architects' Gold Medal, the profession's highest honor.

Concurrent with his legendary architectural career, Graves also became a very successful product designer. His Alessi 9093 Teakettle, designed in 1985 with a bird-shaped whistle at the end of its spout, became the Italian manufacturer's best-selling model and a classic of industrial design. But Graves's longest collaboration was with Target, for which he designed an entire line of housewares between 1998 and 2012. "I still have a Michael Graves for Target broom, as a matter of fact, and a chip clip," says Erica Ceder, DLR Group principal and project architect for the Portland Building redesign, and who was attending architecture school at Ball State University, in Graves's home state of Indiana, when he began collaborating with Target. "That product collection really elevated my awareness of his work and it was such a memorable moment for me because it was the first time an architect was in the broader public eye beyond the design community," she says. "I had family members, who couldn't name a single architect previously, suddenly asking me about Michael Graves and letting me know that they bought his toaster. Looking at that collection now, that I know so much more about his career and the tenets of postmodernism, I see it as another example of how Michael Graves sought to make architecture more accessible and relatable to people."

He also went on to design extensively for J.C. Penney as well as products for Walt Disney Company retail stores. In 2003 after suffering a spinal cord infection, Graves became paralyzed from the waist down. Now moving with the aid of a wheelchair, he began to turn his attention to redesigning this and other products to aid disabled persons.

Randy Gragg said of Graves that night in 2014, as the architect looked on, "From Josef Hofman to the Bauhaus to Frank Gehry, a number of architects have designed both buildings and objects. But besides the sheer breadth of Michael Graves's work, I would like to contend what sets him apart from that amazing pack is his wit and his urge to make people happy. What other architect has so unabashedly reached for the smile more than the shock, and for joy more than awe? Whatever opinions may be about Michael Graves's contributions to the history of architecture and design, what cannot be denied is the generosity of the spirit behind it."

Michael Graves enjoyed a successful career as both architect and product designer with notable collections for Alessi and Target.

Photograph by Peter Aaron Esto/OTTO

"Michael Graves's five-decade career could be summed up in one simple word: Reach."

- Randy Gragg

Image by DLR Group

The Portland Building as the reconstruction nears completion.

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

CHAPTER 2:

THE CASE *for* RECONSTRUCTION

When Michael Graves made his last visit to the Rose City, for a public discussion at the Portland Art Museum on October 9, 2014, the legendary architect knew it was a make-or-break moment for the building and its future. The City of Portland had spent the two years prior examining the chronic issues plaguing the Portland Building as well as exploring potential solutions and evaluating costs. By early 2014, the building's future expressed a kind of sticker-shock over potential repair and renovation costs. "My reaction is we should basically tear it down and build something new," Commissioner Dan Saltzman had told The Oregonian, calling the building "a nightmare for people who work there."

Talking onstage with host Randy Gragg at the museum, Graves recalled earlier in the day having stood outside the Portland Building and feeling a sense of pride. "It's so glorious," he said. "It's so full of ideas. This is a major building in America, whether Portland knows it or not." The architect made it clear the threat of demolition was on his mind. "Buildings all need care," Graves told interviewer Randy Gragg in the art museum talk, "and so does the Portland Building."

Previous image by James Ewing/JBSA

WE CAN OVERCOME

Although Graves died on March 12, 2015 not knowing for certain the Portland Building's fate, a private conversation back in Portland had given him hope. In a private dinner in Graves's honor at the historic Watzek House in Portland's West Hills the night before the art museum talk, longtime developer and Portland Planning Commission member John Russell had told Graves that his building would be restored. Russell was not a City of Portland employee, but he had been part of an advisory committee assembled by the City of Portland's chief administrative officer, Fred Miller. After considering every option from demolition to selling the building to a private party, Russell told Graves, the committee had recommended that the city restore this landmark for itself. While in Portland, Graves expressed support for an anticipated series of design changes, and spoke of "the things we can overcome." For this venerable architect, a potential renovation was the opportunity he'd always wanted: to rebuild the Portland Building the right way, closer to how it was meant to be built back in 1982.

Randy Gragg (left) interviews Graves (right) a the Portland Art Museum in 2014 in what would be Graves's last visit to Portland.

Video still courtesy Portland Art Museum.

"That's what inspired me to bring him out," says Randy Gragg. "I felt like the event was a turning point in helping Fred, [successor Tom] Rinehart and other influencers to recognize that the biggest deficits of the building could be overcome." Earlier that same day, in an Architect Magazine interview, the architect had been even more specific and, subtly, spoke of the building in a future tense. "The windows will have clear glass now, I'm sure." Graves said. "So the building will be lighter. But we also want the interior to be deployed in a way that open office systems can be used." He expressed support for reclaiming ground-floor retail spaces for an expanded lobby, and removing the parking garage to be able to look out onto Chapman Square. But behind the optimism was still an understandable sensitivity.

> "I would be devastated, I know, if any of my buildings came down," he said, "not just in my lifetime but ever. They are your children and you love them all."

At his office in Princeton, New Jersey a few days before flying to Oregon, Graves consulted with Patrick Burke, a principal who had joined the firm while the Portland Building was under construction in 1982. "He grabbed me and said, 'There's talk of tearing it down or restoring it. I'm nervous people are going to be throwing tomatoes at me. I'd like to make some suggestions for what they could do to improve this building. What are your ideas?'" Burke recalls. "I said, 'Clear glass.' Michael said, 'That's a given.'"

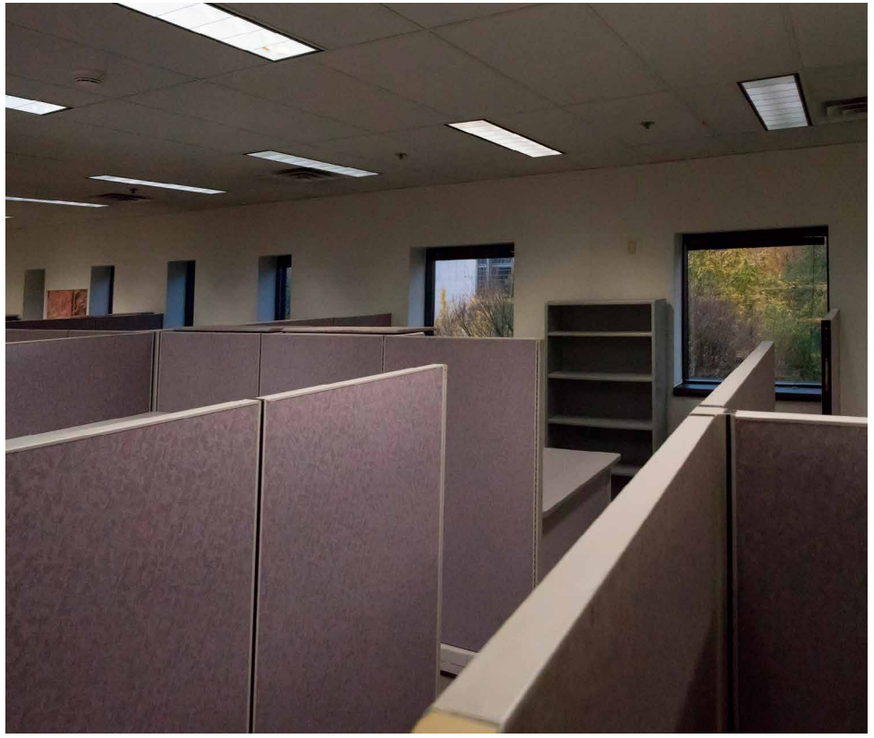
Graves was also already curious about re-cladding the Portland Building. "He mentioned a project we'd done in The Hague [the Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport, completed in 1998] where the government had bought a poorly built office building and the curtainwall was failing, so they stripped the facades off and we redid the facades," Burke remembers. "Michael said, 'Why can't we do what

we did in The Hague?' I said, 'Because the Portland Building's exterior is the exoskeleton.' He said, 'You must have some other ideas.' I knew from previous conversations that Michael would have been very happy to change the building and make it better. When we interviewed with clients, a very common question would be, '20 years from now I need to make some changes. Am I going to have to deal with you speaking in the media against it?' He said, 'No. I want my buildings to live on, not to be out of date.'"

A BUILDING IN NEED

By 2014, this postmodernist landmark was not just showing its age. "It was a nightmare to keep the building occupiable because of the different issues that we were having," recalls Robert Kieta, who managed facilities services for the City of Portland from 2000-2016. "We were running into problem after problem, with no real fixable solutions: water leakage in the windows and on the roof, the sagging 14th and 15th floors, and problems keeping the building at the right temperature."

To mitigate water damage, "We caulked windows. We had professional water-sealing people in many times trying to patch and fix. We ended up with gobs of sealant on the windows and they still leaked," Kieta says. "The carpets would be saturated when storms came in from certain direction. And of course with moisture can come mold and the possibility of a sick building. While I don't think we had those issues, we had people afraid that we did, so we did study after study. There was never a time where the air samples indicated dangerous levels, but perception is the thing you fight a lot of times: what people perceive to be a safe work environment." Even if the building was not unsafe, the



The Portland Building had a reputation for being a dark and unpleasant working environment driven largely by small window openings with black tinted glass.

The original building envelope struggled to deal with Portland's wet climate and leaks became a constant maintenance struggle for the City.

Photos documenting the building conditions prior to the reconstruction show evidence of the long-term water damage (bottom).

Photos courtesy DLR Group

lack of natural light made the interior gloomy. “It was always an issue. It wasn’t anything we could do something about. There was always a fight to be by the windows, because they were small and there were few around.” Eventually, Kieta and then-chief administrative officer Jack Graham began to conclude “that it’s not a maintainable building. You’re pouring tons of money into a building and turning around and doing the same a few years later, but you’d always wind up with a still crappy building. It had to stop. The discussions at that point started.”

In 2012, the City of Portland issued a Request for Proposals for an intended Portland Building exterior repair. Local firm FFA Architecture & Interiors was selected, but what they found awakened city leaders to the enormity of the challenge.

“Knowing what I know now, I think we had a naïve view: that this was going to be a typical preservation project and we’d go in and be able to do just a very light-touch repair,” recalls Erica Ceder, today a part of DLR Group’s Portland Building design team, but at the time a part of the assessment team at FFA. Digging into the building’s maintenance history, it became clear that there had never been full-blown assessment, no cataloging of past repairs, and no theories about how to stop the leaks. “It opened the city’s eyes to how many little repair projects they had done over 30 years,” Ceder adds, “And yet they were basically still sitting in the same spot of having no resolution for these issues.”

BIG DECISION

In 2013 and 2014, demolition was being openly considered for Michael Graves’s most famous building. “It would have been possible to tear the building down,” Kieta says, “but that came with a lot of issues, including the [loss of the] National Register designation. It wasn’t necessarily something I wanted to see happen, but it was starting to seem unavoidable.” Yet that wouldn’t be easy either. “You couldn’t implode it and you’d basically have to go brick by brick to keep it from disrupting transportation. So we looked at purchasing other buildings, either downtown or across the river. We looked at pretty much every option from tearing it down to and building a new building to renovating the building to selling it.”

To make the right call Kieta and Miller, the city’s chief administrative officer, convened an advisory group of local building-industry veterans including developers, contractors and architects. The advisory group agreed that the city should retain the Portland Building, in a full reconstruction that not only addressed the building’s defects and seismic limitations but transformed the workplace experience. They also urged Miller to avoid cost overruns. “So we basically did the scoping and wound up with a $195 million budget, completed by the end of 2020,” Miller says. “If I did anything right at the front end, it was that we had a reasonable target and stuck to it. I said, ‘We’re not doing overruns.’” Yet Miller was set to retire at the end of 2016, and a mayoral election was coming, which could hypothetically end the project. But Rinehart, who succeeded Miller, fully supported what had been begun. “The cost-benefit analysis showed it would be more expensive to build somewhere else, and untenable to demolish the building,” Tom Rinehart says. “Reconstruction was the best option for the city. By 2025 it could house nearly a third of our full-time employees so it is an enormously important project.”

A CASE FOR COLLABORATION

Back in the early 1980s, the original Portland Building had been constructed through a design-build, delivery, which helped assure that the city's $24 million budget would not be exceeded. In 2016, just as city leaders ultimately agreed that retaining and restoring the Portland Building was wiser than demolition from the point of view of historic-preservation, sustainability, or location, so too was a version of design-build once again a preferred way to assure construction dollars were spent wisely. Only this time, the attraction was the collaborative aspect of this delivery method every bit as much as its budget-conscious approach. In 2015, Bob Kieta hired Jo Wells to be the lead project manager for the Portland Building. Jo had been looking closely at collaborative delivery methods and saw potential benefits.

Before the Portland Building reconstructions, two other public building projects had been completed using collaborative delivery: the reconstructed Edith Green Wendell Wyatt Federal Building in 2013, and the Collaborative Life Sciences Building (now the Robertson Life Sciences Building) at Oregon Health & Science University in 2014. Working with Kathleen Brenes-Morua, the city's chief procurement officer, Wells began to advocate for some type of collaborative delivery method.

Most all major, non-residential building projects are delivered via these and other methods such as design-bid-build, design-build, or construction manager at risk (commonly known as CMGC). The most traditional, design-bid-build, is a linear process in which a contractor is hired only after the design is completed, in two separate contracts. The same contracts define CMGC, but the general contractor is signed on midway through design to identify cost-saving opportunities.

One step further is design-build (DB), which places design and construction teams under a single contract and shared liability. Progressive design-build, which was chosen for the Portland Building reconstruction, is essentially a hybrid between design-build and CMGC, with a contractually single design-construction team, but even earlier team involvement. Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) is the most collaborative of all, with the owner becoming a kind of third collaborative partner. IPD also brings an accelerated timeline, with construction beginning long before final designs are complete. Not only do the architect and contractor fall under one contract and begin together, but so too do nearly all parties that will be involved in the design, construction and end-use of the building.

Collaborative design-build integrates owner, architect and contractor into a cohesive team mentality in order to maximize efficiency and innovation.

Photo courtesy DLR Group

For the Portland Building, "The city was assuming they'd do CMGC, which was typical for large projects at the time," Wells explains. "I started asking questions and got invited to some meetings to discuss it. Immediately I thought, 'This is way more complicated. There's a lot of stakeholders, a lot of eyes on it, and it has to succeed. They'd tried to make this a project for years. How do we make this a real project?' I started throwing out the idea of IPD. Initially what I heard was, 'There's no way we can do that. Public entities can't do IPD.' But I said, 'There are other ways of doing it.'" When Wells and her colleagues spoke to officials at the U.S. General Services Administration, who had overseen the Edith Green Wendell Wyatt, "They talked about an alternative contracting format. It's not IPD but it's close, and it brings in IPD principles." That format was progressive design-build. "It fit exactly what we were aiming for," Wells says. "I was

Former Oregon State Treasurer, Ted Wheeler became the mayor of Portland at the end of 2016.

Photos courtesy Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0 (upper) and CC BY-SA 4.0 (lower)

looking for a team that would come on board at the very beginning. We needed to facilitate the visioning with the bureaus. We wanted the owner to be highly involved in creating a process to ensure we completed the minimum scope required, met our budget and our schedule. This was the best way of doing it." Having separate contracts gave traditional construction projects an inherently adversarial relationship between owner, architect and contractor. "Everyone's trying to make sure their needs are met and they're making the biggest profit. It comes from the fear of being sued. One failed building can ruin a company," Wells says. "The parties lack the mutual trust necessary to breed innovation and efficiency. That's why collaborative delivery is as much a behavioral model as a shared contract. You're constantly reminding people, 'We're in this together. We have the same goals.'"

At the project's outset, for example, her team held series of visioning sessions with all stakeholders, "about how we're going to behave together. That behavior process gets revisited over and over." Without such reinforcement, "People will start to point fingers and it doesn't help," Wells explains. In collaborative methods like progressive design-build, the emphasis is on coming together to solve problems. "You really have to build trust with each other. And through that you get much greater outcomes. It's not to say there isn't conflict. But everyone comes in there with integrity and a common goal and a reasonable perspective. And it's been amazing."

GOING TO COUNCIL

The ultimate deciders on whether to truly go forward would still be the Portland City Council. "We still had to make the case for reconstructing the building," explains Jamie Waltz, the former strategic planning and development manager under Miller (now a deputy director in Multnomah County's Department of Community Services). "We'd done a lot of research about the different options: tearing it down, reconstruction, selling the building. I really feel through every step of the way we looked deeply at alternatives. We had to be very thorough in bringing people to the table, always having the different points of view to make sure we were thinking about all the different angles. Because politics always overlays everything we do at the city. Terms [of City Council members] are four years. We always had to consider new administrations coming in and how that might impact a project."

In November 2016, Ted Wheeler was elected as the 53rd mayor of Portland, succeeding Charlie Hales. Wheeler, previously the Treasurer of Oregon from 2010-17, brought a keen eye for fiscal considerations. "Mayor Wheeler was very focused on ensuring we delivered the project on-time and on-budget." Waltz says. By this time, however, the design-construction team was established with a collaborative delivery method meant to control costs.

Any Portland Building reconstruction would also need to be vetted by several bureaus and within the structure of city policies and goals. "We had to think about green building. We knew going before the Historic Landmarks Commission was a huge consideration," Waltz explains. "And we had 1300 employees we would have to move. How do we create a space for them knowing the impact of form and function? How do we maximize space, because it's expensive? We wanted to use our government dollars wisely." The project also had to win over skeptical city staffers who worked in the Portland Building. "There were challenges getting buy-in because we were going to decrease people's square footage. It's not just about doing the project for the elected," Waltz says. "It's also getting the buy-in of the staff."

She knew of which she spoke, having worked in the Portland Building for nearly a decade. "It just really opened my eyes," she adds. "We couldn't just do government business as usual with this building. We had to be creative and ask how to do it in a different way. It gave us an opportunity to come together as a city in a way we hadn't before, about how the city wants to function in the future. It wasn't just a reconstructed building. It was a catalyst for a lot of positive change."

ASSEMBLING A TEAM

In spring of 2016, the City of Portland officially issued a Request for Proposals from general contractor and architect teams. "Getting the RFP out was huge," says Jonathan Nyone of Day CPM, who acted as owner's representative for the City of Portland. "There was such a known political sensitivity to this project, just given the nature of it being relatively controversial: the viability of the project and why it was being done, the amount of money spent. We knew there were going to be some naysayers."

The project received proposals from just three design-build teams. "It's a renovation, so you never know what you're going to find, not to mention all the historical sensitivity of preserving the integrity of the original design," Nyone explains. "And even in the Northwest, which is pretty advanced in terms of delivery methods, progressive design-build was still relatively new. To take an already-controversial project and apply a relatively new delivery method was just unsettling, I think, for people coming into it." Howard S. Wright's leaders were well aware of the RFP because city staffers had reached out to them as general contractor for the Edith Green Wendell Wyatt reconstruction (another re-clad) in order to learn more about the federal building's collaborative delivery method.

"We knew that the Portland Building was coming," says Howard S. Wright president Troy Dickson, "and we were very, very motivated."

Yet in talking to architecture firms about pursuing the RFP, "there was so much apprehension about the project," Dickson adds, "Many designers didn't feel like you could get through the project without being criticized." But DLR Group, with whom Howard S. Wright had partnered in pursuit of the Multnomah County Central Courthouse, "came into the Portland Building conversation with a lot of excitement and energy and ideas," he says. "When I met Carla and her team, that cinched it for me."

Members of the design-build team came together representing multiple different companies and disciplines. Pictured left to right: Doug Greenwalt of Howard S. Wright, Melissa Johnson of Benson Industries, and Erica Ceder of DLR Group.

Photo courtesy DLR Group

During Multnomah County Courthouse interviews, DLR Group had also distinguished itself with the county's project manager, Day CPM Services, which was managing the Portland Building process. Founder Mike Day suggested to Weinheimer that DLR Group should apply. "That was the first time I really knew it was possible," she recalls. "I got pretty excited."

Together the team developed not just a plan for tackling the leaks and other challenges, but a philosophy. "Troy and I talked about how important it was to think about this project not just in terms of fixing a building but telling new stories," Weinheimer remembers. "No one's going to get excited about just fixing something. This needed to become something bigger and better than a fix. It needed to be transformative."

In interviews, each designer-builder team was asked for a plan. "We really wanted them to demonstrate they'd done due diligence to understand what it's going to take to perform the work and stop the leak

and do that successfully, on time and on budget," Nyone says. On both fronts, "DLR Group and Howard S. Wright Construction did stand out." Yet this was only Phase 1. In the progressive design-build format, "You have an off-ramp, a point where you're either happy with the design-builder team's work and say, 'Go forward,' or have the chance to cut loose and search for another team," he adds. "Thankfully, we had a great team and that wasn't the route we chose."

The DLR Group-HSW team focused on proving the project was doable within the budget and the timeframe allocated. "We were working intensely toward an end-of-2016 deadline before Fred retired and a new CAO and mayor came on board," Weinheimer says. "By December, we all felt we had the budget to do it and a design path that we could all get behind and move forward. It was a lot of fun, actually."

Carla Weinheimer (right) of DLR Group leads the integrated team during early design conversations.

Photo courtesy DLR Group

EQUITY

"From the beginning, equity was a core value driving the Portland Building renovation. We had the most aggressive goals the city had ever set at the time. It was a big topic and a big source of concern," City of Portland facilities manager Jo Wells says.

Committing to equity was just the beginning. Next it was about setting goals: participation numbers that were attainable but also improved upon past city-owned building projects. "I believe we were the first city project that not only had an equity goal to reach but disaggregated goals: meaning that we had separate goals for each category of MWESB," Wells explains. The challenges were different in each group. "On the consultant side, the minority numbers were the hardest to hit. On the construction side, the women numbers are often hardest to hit. Especially with our trade partners, each had subcontractors under them that helped us to get there."

A key was to make equity an ongoing conversation, through working group sessions where owner and building team members all contributed ideas, and where outside organizations joined in to introduce and connect more potential MWESB collaborators. "We were introduced to several firms that we traditionally hadn't done work with," Howard S. Wright Vice-President Todd Miller says. A separate oversight committee also scored the team for their equity efforts in five categories, of which equity was one. To make the Portland Building reconstruction possible for smaller firms, the team also divided up some of the work into smaller packages, such as painting and drywall. It's not to say there weren't hiccups. The team learned at one point, for example, that a contract awarded to an MWESB-qualifying subcontractor couldn't be counted because that company had further subcontracted to a non-MWESB-qualifying company.

Yet the learning curves are just that: part of the natural process. "We've got a long way to go" says Wells "but it's cities like Portland that are making it a priority. We had people tell us these were unattainable goals, that there was no way we were going to make them. But Christine Moody (chief procurement officer at the time) pushed hard and said, 'If we don't set high goals, there's no way we are going to do better.' And we surpassed almost every goal." Well continues, "Maybe goals do seem out of reach sometimes, but you have to push through. And for the Portland Building it worked."

A diverse team of dedicated trade and craft workers contributed to the transformation of the Portland Building.

Photo courtesy DLR Group

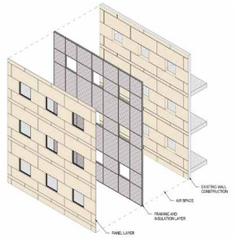
Photo courtesy DLR Group

CHAPTER 3:

RENOVATED *and* RE-IMAGINED

Because they knew the façade was the biggest challenge, DLR Group and Howard S. Wright started a collaborative charrette the day after they got the job, with a focus on the exterior. All the while, the degree of seismic reinforcement was unsettled, as was the question of whether employees would have to vacate the building during construction. "Anything that had a potential big budget swing we needed to land the approach," Weinheimer explains.

The architect-contractor team also began to bring on subconsultants and subcontractors, from structural engineer KPFF and MEP civil engineers PAE to curtainwall expert Benson Glass. Both Benson and Cincinnati, Ohio-based consultant Façade Forensics helped guide DLR Group and Howard S. Wright toward a proper diagnosis and prescription for the leaky Portland Building exterior. "It made a huge difference," Weinheimer says. "It's one thing to have a contractor like you might do with CMGC: helping you out and asking trade partners [for pricing information]. It's another thing to have them on the team and committing to those numbers. That was a really important process given the complexity."



Having façade experts on board allowed the team to make a choice they could feel confident about. And to the team's surprise, it came quickly: to reclad the building with aluminum over a rain-screen. "The decision that was going to be the most controversial, arguably, of the whole project, was landed on in the very first meeting," Jonathan Nyone of Day CPM Services recalls. "It was just a matter of having all the right people in the room."

Lewis was adamant that the recladding was necessary given the city's requirements. "If we were going to make this investment and we want a 50 to 100-year building, this was the approach we had to take," he explains. "There are many different products and materials that were evaluated and considered, but in order to meet code and protect ourselves from wind and weather, we had to reclad the building." In a letter to the City of Portland, Lewis wrote that the building's defects "could not be corrected by restoration-type repairs limited to traditional preservation techniques."

Particularly given that façade water penetration necessitated the renovation, choosing a rain-screen exterior wall system for the reconstruction—where the cladding is separated from a moisture-resistant barrier to create a capillary break, allowing easy drainage—made sense. "The more we wrestled with the concrete and how any window would perform over time, the more it seemed a rainscreen was needed to make the concrete section perform at a much higher level," Weinheimer explains. "It was a significant expenditure over some of the other solutions, but it was important that it perform well over the next 50 to 75 years. We knew with an aluminum over-cladding we would have risks relative to Landmarks Commission approval and preservation community conversations. But it met the goals of the project significantly better than any alternative."

Unitized curtainwall panel being lifted into place over the original concrete building shell.

Photo courtesy DLR Group

Coincidentally, back in 1946 Portland had seen a pioneering use of aluminum cladding: on Pietro Belluschi's Equitable Building. Taking advantage of an abundance of aluminum produced for Kaiser's three local shipyards during World War II, Belluschi's design utilized glass and aluminum façade panels, earning the distinction of the first modern curtainwalled office building in the United States, beating the United Nations Secretariat Building in New York City by just a few months. The Portland Building was much different from these glass-ensconced skyscrapers, but coincidentally, a member of its reconstruction team, Benson Industries, had been the façade subcontractor for the Secretariat's reconstructed curtainwall. "We've done a number of overclads and reclads of buildings," says Benson president Jeff Heymann. For the Portland Building, "We knew we could get aluminum panels to look a lot like the existing materials."

The team looked at a number of options and formally documented the decision-making process, grading each based on cost, maintenance and aesthetic factors. "The decision was very straightforward when you laid it out that way," says Weinheimer, "which is important given that it was a controversial decision." What about ceramic tile or terracotta? After all, both were originally considered and even favored by Graves's office originally. "Ceramic tile or terracotta would have made the anchorage a lot more complex, and carried a lot of additional weight," Heymann explains. "With tile, it was a question of whether we'd have to look at grout or other things." It also would have been difficult to find at the scale of tile necessary for certain upper portions of the façade. Terracotta, Heymann says, "got a lot more modern in its usage. There are exciting uses of it now. But a lot of the decision [against using the material] had to do with joinery and what it would look like. The metal would have fewer parts and pieces and would be the most lightweight."

What about precast concrete or cement-based panels, or even limestone, as the team also explored? Again, it was a weight problem, so much so that such panels would have required upgrading the foundation.

GOING TO THE SOURCE

Erica Ceder of DLR Group takes a look at the first shipment of exterior panels prior to installation.

Photo courtesy DLR Group

To be really sure, though, they had to go back to the source. Michael Graves had commented favorably in lectures and articles over the years about changing the dark glass to clear and opening up the ground floor. But what would he think of aluminum? Graves, who passed away in 2015, could no longer be consulted. But principals like Burke, who had been with the firm during construction and for decades afterward, were firm in supporting the rain screen and aluminum. "When I first got a call from Erica and Carla in 2016, they were very ginger about it. They'd realized they'd better figure out what the Graves office thought before they started down the road," Burke remembers. "I was surprised to see just how much the Portland Building was crumbling, but I actually was impressed with their approach. I was kicking myself that I hadn't come up with a solution like this [metal over-cladding]. I talked to the partners in the firm, and I said, 'I'm going to support this but I want to make sure you guys are on board.' The partners agreed. I think DLR Group was relieved." Burke's pragmatism about changes stemmed directly from the building's

(left to right) Carla Weinheimer and Erica Ceder of DLR Group and Patrick Burke of Michael Graves Architecture and Design present at the AIA Conference on Architecture in 2019.

Photo by Timothy Niou

bittersweet origins: a world-renowned landmark that wasn't built to last. "The original design intent was fairly different from what got built. It was a cheapened version and had a lot of problems. Michael knew that." With such a compromised original building, Burke and his fellow principals at Michael Graves Architecture & Design reasoned, the idea of a Portland Building newly wrapped in aluminum with a protective rain screen behind it wasn't a threat to the historic integrity of the original building, like a material change to most any other world-famous landmark might be construed. Instead, they viewed the new façade plan as a chance to finally fulfill something closer to Graves's original intent. "Why wouldn't you improve it? Isn't the architect's first response to deliver a working building? You have an obligation to the user," Burke says. "I think you should let the buildings live. Michael was asked that question many times. He said, 'Do it. I'd rather see my buildings get updated than be out of date and out of step.' The metal is a thin new veneer. For him the concrete was nothing more than a flat colored surface, and the metal would be the same thing. For him it would have been a surface to put color on."

THE BASICS AND (HOPEFULLY) MORE

As the design and construction team completed programming in 2016 and prepared for the beginning of reconstruction in December 2017, in keeping with the progressive design-build process they developed a baseline program, what Howard S. Wright's Todd Miller describes as, "Things we can deliver with high confidence." That involved evaluating different curtainwall options, MEP (mechanical-electrical-plumbing) systems, and fortifications to its structural supports and establishing the one that best fulfilled the project goals as the baseline. In addition to the

(opp) New steel reinforced walls were added to the interior core of the Portland Building to increase the building's earthquake resistance and were left exposed as a design element of the new workspaces.

Photos courtesy DLR Group

baseline, the team kept a list of enhancements that could be included if budget allowed. "Then we could evaluate the rest of the budget," Miller explains. "There was a laundry list of enhancements to the interior we were able to incorporate.

"You continue to have this list of wishes, and ideally as you progress through the project, you can add a little bit more. There may be savings related to some of the worst-case scenarios not happening. It's this curve: When that risk profile goes down, you can start freeing up elements. If things go well, you can add many of those back. If they don't go well, you can still be successful. For the Portland Building, Miller notes "There was a laundry list of enhancements that we were able to incorporate."

READY FOR THE BIG ONE

There was never any question that the Portland Building rehabilitation would include added seismic stabilization. After fixing the façade leaks, it was perhaps the City of Portland's biggest priority. At the time, earthquakes were also a frequent topic of conversation in the general public. In 2015, a widely-read, award-winning New Yorker magazine article by Kathryn Schultz, "The Earthquake That Will Devastate the Pacific Northwest," had awakened millions of Oregonians and Washingtonians to a predicted Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake, potentially large enough to rank among the largest recorded seismic events in American history.

Before the reconstruction, the Portland Building was not equipped to withstand such forces. It was home to a data center considered part of the city's Essential Facilities, which would require the highest levels of seismic stabilization in order to keep operating even after a major earthquake. But the City of Portland decided to relocate the data center upon the reconstruction, giving the design-construction team and its client a decision to make: whether to meet current new-building seismic requirements even though it wasn't legally required. Even so, for the sake of its employees and its future, the structure had to be earthquake-resilient.

"We ended up at the current code, which is one step up from what was required," Weinheimer explains. "The team felt we had to improve safety even if it wasn't part of Essential Facilities anymore, because in 1982 there was very little understanding of earthquakes." The exterior walls provided most of the lateral support, but in a big earthquake, the lack of sheer walls going through the building for extra bracing meant it would be susceptible. In the redesign, "There was no way to stiffen the exterior enough to make that be the solution," the architect explains. "The best solution was to take the interior core where the elevators and stairs are and add a stiffening element all the way around that core. It starts down at the basement and goes all through the building." This allowed the redesign to maintain the open floor plates that work best for administrative offices.

COLORS

Once the team decided on an aluminum exterior, they had to get the details right. That meant both replicating the façade's multiple color tones. Yet was it replicating 1982 or 2016? Given the importance of color to this building, they had to be sure. Burke was able to confirm Weinheimer's hunch. "Carla said, 'I'm pretty sure each time they've repainted it the building got brighter and more colorful,' he recalls. "I went back to our archives. We still had the original paint swaths. She was right: the original colors were more muted." To put the new façade material to the test, a visual mockup was affixed to the top of the Portland Building façade. "Everyone felt a lot more comfortable once they saw that," Heymann recalls. At that kind of height and distance, we had the color tone right. We had the gloss right. It was going to be fine. It was going to be very close to what was existing."

If there is a discernible difference in the look of the façade today, it's only because the exterior is actually closer to what Graves intended than the actual pre-reconstruction building was. "One thing that's obvious is the degree of precision that exists with this building now is far superior to what existed originally," Lewis says. "To some degree, you wouldn't know it unless you were looking for it, but this is what Graves and his team were trying to build. But they could only get to a certain level of accuracy. We've certainly upgraded that to a very high degree."

(left to right) The Portland Building soon after completion in 1983, pre-reconstruction in 2016, under construction in 2018 and after reconstruction in 2020.

Photo (far leftl) by Steve Morgan, CC BY-SA 3.0

Other photos on this page by Sally Painter

GLASS DISMISSED

(opp. left) Interior view during demolition shows the amount of original glass that was not clear. This gave the design team an opportunity to increase the glass area on the inside without impacting the historic exterior (opp. right).

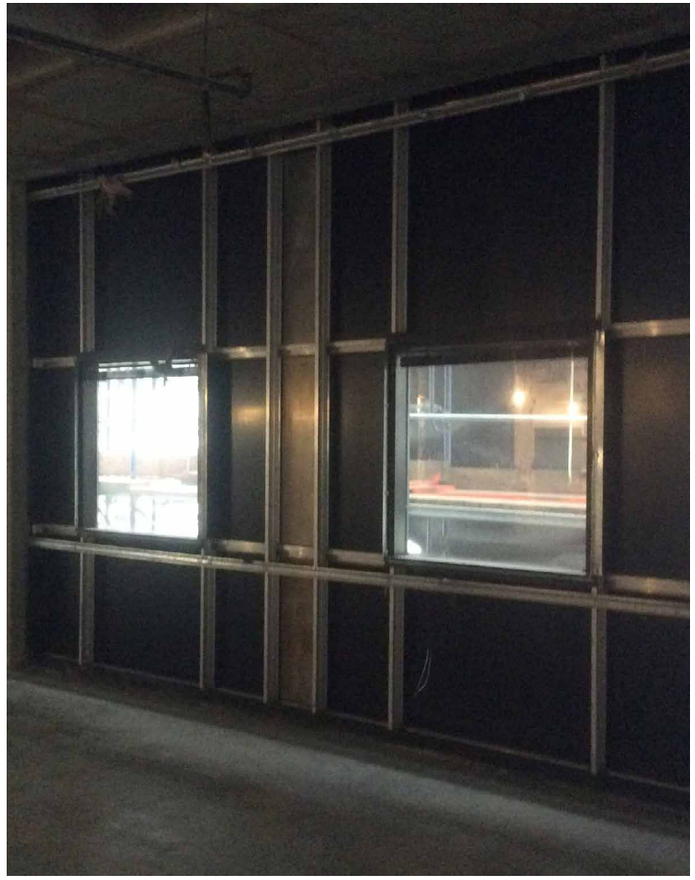
Photo courtesy DLR Group (opp. left)

Photograph by James Ewing (opp. right)

Although fixing leaks had been the original impetus for the reconstruction and seismic upgrading second, no holistic approach could be complete without changing the glass. No doubt the move would alter the look of this National Register of Historic Places-listed landmark. Yet because it was a functional move that would dramatically improve natural light levels, it would prove less controversial than the aluminum and rain screen façade over-clad. "They did a survey of the staff and in the old building before we started the project," Jonathan Nyone recalls. "The biggest complaints was lack of natural light. In fact, it was the far and resounding number-one answer. We knew that the new design would need to we need to solve that."

At the project's grand opening back in 1982, the dark glass had upset Graves perhaps more than anything. "It actually was a mistake," recalls Burke, chosen by the architect of record to meet energy-code strictures without Graves's sign-off. When he saw it, "Michael blew up. They said, 'Too late, we bought black glass.'" Thankfully glass technology has evolved substantially since the early 1980s. It's no longer necessary to darken the glass like a pair of sunglasses. Today contemporary curtainwall glass panels can reduce glare and heat penetration while still appearing relatively clear. And given Graves's reaction to the original glass, there's no doubt it's what he would have preferred.

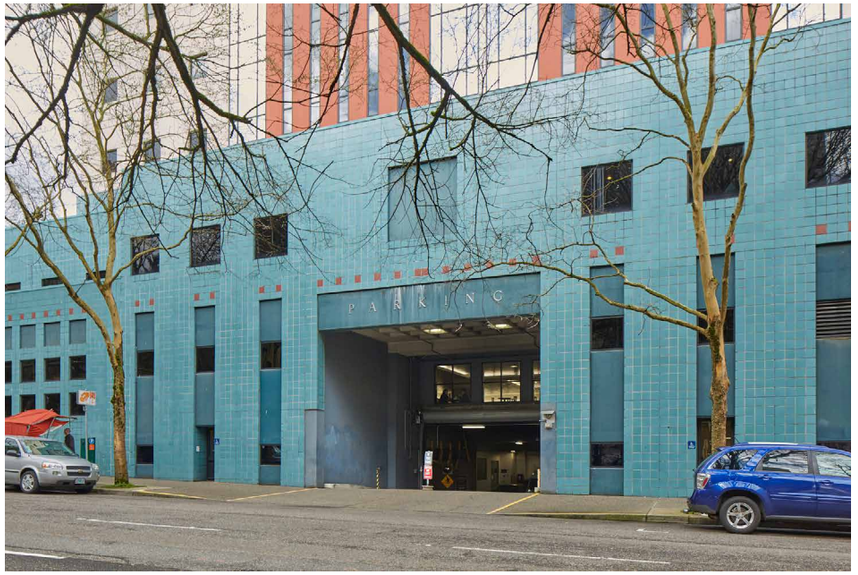
"The challenge in the modern era is we pretty much advanced our building detailing and materials about every decade. Something built in the 1980s is three generations of glass behind where we are today,"



Lewis says. “Putting back what was there originally is impossible because that product doesn’t exist anymore. Wood is wood. Brick and stone haven’t changed much over the centuries. But our modern materials change every decade.” In addition to dark glass, the original Portland Building façade also included spandrel glass, where the back side of the panel is covered, so not just little light but no light penetrates into the interior. “We were able to take the small repetitive openings and turn the spandrel glass transparent,” Ceder explains. “We gave our interior design team a lot of additional light. That was perceived to be the biggest challenge of this project: how do you take a building that’s had this reputation for so long as a dark and grim experience and brighten that up without making major changes to the exterior of the building? I think we tackled that one pretty well.”

GROUND CONTROL

Glass became just as important on a redesigned Portland Building ground floor, as part of a reconfigured urban design plan and entry sequence. “Improving the building at the ground level, we thought of that as almost a separate task,” Weinheimer recalls. “It was less about historic preservation and more about urban design.” DLR Group and other members of the team reached out to the American Institute of Architects’ volunteer Urban Design Panel for input, even going back a second time and show how the design responded to their suggestions. The retail spaces lining the covered ground-floor loggia had seen better days. By the time reconstruction approached, little more than one small convenience store was left. “Integrating retail into the ground level as a way to draw people in is not super popular in urban planning for civic buildings anymore,” Ceder explains.



(top) The original 4th Avenue facade with a centrally located entrance to basement parking and loading. (bottom) The original loggia spaces were home to small retail shops.

Photos courtesy DLR Group.

CHAPTER 4:

A NEW ERA *of* PRESERVATION

Before reconstruction of the Portland Building could commence, its redesign needed to be vetted by a variety of governmental entities. The City of Portland's Historic Landmark Commission would have to give their approval, and the State of Oregon Historic Preservation Office would also have its say. Even the National Parks Service was a factor, given that it administers listings for the National Register of Historic Places, to which the Portland Building had been added in 2011, decades ahead of the usual 50-year threshold for a work of architecture to be considered officially historic.

"Given that this was a very nontraditional preservation approach to the building, there was a lot of angst around whether it was appropriate," explains Jessica Engeman, a project manager for Portland developer Venerable Properties and University of Oregon adjunct historic preservation professor who served as a consultant for the project. "That was a hot button question that went through the entire process."

Left: the original detailing including replication of the ornamental ribbons and medallions.

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

PROCESS OF UNDERSTANDING

(opp. top) A mock-up of the new curtainwall system was assembled to confirm a visual match of the new with the historic. (opp. bottom) The design team watches as the mock-up is placed on the building.

Photos courtesy DLR Group

Some, at least upon first hearing about the intent to reclad the building in another material, opposed the idea of such drastic change. After all, historic preservation best practices call for materials to be saved and repaired or replaced with like materials. Yet the reaction many preservationists had to the recladding actually resembled some of the architects' initial response.

"I've been working on this building since 2012, and I've gone through many different phases of thinking about it," DLR Group's Erica Ceder explains. "Because when we first started, everything seemed potentially surmountable, like, 'There's some water intrusion, but we'll probably be able to address it.' The more we went down the rabbit hole, the more things just weren't going to work. We started referring to it as the grieving period. There's a very natural reaction of, 'No, that can't be it! There has to be another way.' Then you kind of go through the stages of denial, and eventually acceptance. That was kind of a common theme with a lot of our team members."

The team's own historic-preservation consultant went through the same stages. "The very first meeting I attended with the design team—when Michael Lewis said, 'If you really want to solve the problem, this is what you have to do,' I just about choked," Engeman recalls. "I'd never seen that move looked upon favorably. It was so contrary to standard preservation, where you repair and if you can't repair you replace in kind. But the materials, the colors, and the reason the building was significant made it obvious this was the right approach. Once we started fleshing out the details, I was completely sold on it. But basically we had to go through this process with all the preservation people saying, 'You're planning to do what? That's not preservation!' We had to educate them on why the building was failing, what Michael Graves intended, and how we could still preserve what was historically important about the building even as we were essentially remaking it."

"The team thoroughly evaluated more traditional preservation approaches too," explains Ceder. "We looked at options that preserved the painted concrete surface and added flashings at the openings and it did not create a long-term solution, and it diluted Graves's original design with all of these extra lines and shapes that didn't belong on that facade."

This conversation echoes a larger current in the preservation world. "Trying to fix buildings built in the last quarter of the 19th and first half of the 20th century, certain methods prevailed. The philosophy of removing those parts that have deteriorated with similar or identical parts actually worked," Michael Lewis explains. "When you get to the Seventies, Eighties, Nineties, those same philosophies don't give you the same results because the materials were very different. I give credit to Carla and Erica for really understanding this: it's still preservation."

While consulting on the Portland Building, Lewis's firm was also consulting the National Gallery in Washington, DC in its restoration of the art museum's east wing. "We just took all the marble off its curtainwall and put it back on," he explains. Just like the Portland Building, the idea was that when you're done it doesn't look any different than when we started. The same principle applies in both. Staying true to the architect's original vision was true for both projects, even though the methods for going about fixing them was different."

DEBATE AND COMMON GROUND

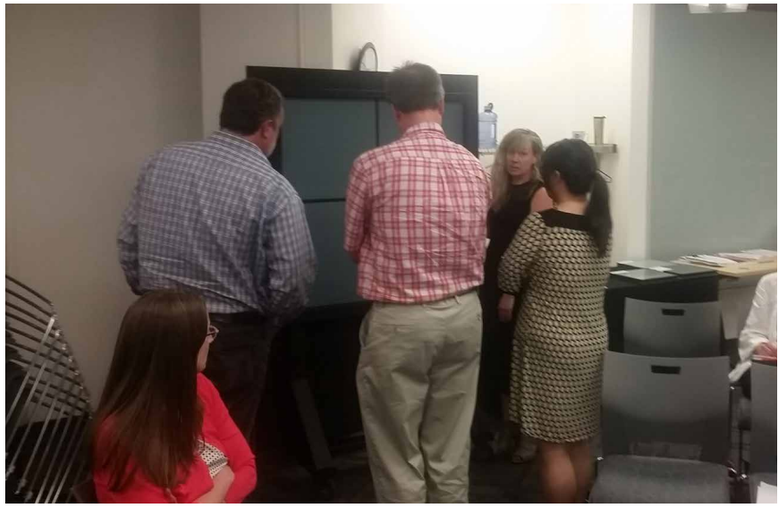
To try and find common ground with the State Historic Preservation Office about standards, the team reached out for informal conversations long before the official process began. SHPO's response was rigid yet understanding. "They said, 'We have these criteria. This isn't what preservation standards currently accept,'" Engeman remembers. "But they also acknowledged the building had a lot of problems, from a functional and technical side. They fully acknowledged the correct approach may not actually be the preservation approach: that we may not be able to make everyone happy in that sense."

Indeed, the National Register listing was in jeopardy. In a letter to Ian P. Johnson, the associate deputy state historic preservation officer for Oregon, Lisa Deline, a reviewer with the National Register of Historic Places, wrote that the over-cladding, "if undertaken, would destroy the historic integrity of the building and necessitate its removal from the National Register." Deline's letter did not go unnoticed. "Those pieces of correspondence were a bit of a lightning rod at the [City of Portland] Landmarks Commission level," Engeman says. "Their mission is to keep National Register-listed buildings listed through appropriate work. For the Portland Building to lose its listing, what would that mean?"

That the Portland Building needed its leaks fixed no one questioned. But some preservationists argued that city leaders were simply going too far. "The City said, 'We want you to give us a warranty for 10 years.' A repair of the existing façade will get you a warranty for three to five years, depending on the sealant, but not a 10-year warranty. The city raised the bar on their expectations to the point where there is only one solution: to completely cover it up with a brand new skin," architect Peter Meijer, who had written the Portland Building's 2011 National Register listing, argued in an Architect magazine article.

Yet in the spring and summer of 2017, as the Portland Building went through two hearings with the City of Portland's Historic Landmarks Commission, the team found sympathetic ears. "We had an opportunity to talk about preservation issues involving not just the Portland Building but a lot of buildings from this era: this shift to mass produced, industrialized materials and construction methods," Ceder explains. "You have a lot of post-World War II architecture built with systems and methodologies that weren't well understood. The whole concept of building science hadn't really entered the field. A lot of these construction methods were not conducive to the long-term durability of the building."

The standards, though, were written for an earlier era of architecture, and different materials. "It's very difficult to take these standards for



Members of the Portland Historic Landmarks Commission view tile samples during one of the Portland Building's review hearings.

Photo courtesy DLR Group

masonry and wood construction types and apply them to a mass-produced product," Ceder says. "They behave differently. If I've got a 1982 curtainwall that's failing, there are no standards for that. The curtainwall window system used in the Portland Building in 1982 has been discontinued and you can't buy it. And even if you could, should you? We know they don't perform well and in some cases don't even hold together well. I think that's going to have to be a change in thinking."

Somewhat ironically, it was the Portland Building's own 2011 National Register application that helped convince Landmarks Commission members to approve the reconstruction. "We argued we weren't changing the building's character, because that character as defined in the National Register listing was about the bold color, the historical references, the oversized geometry," Ceder says. "Nowhere does it address the materiality of the building or say the concrete was somehow important because of the textures or character that it conveyed. That essentially became our argument too."

"If it's the color and style that define the character, the materials are just a vehicle for the design expression."

The Portland Building's restoration, though unique, typifies a larger conversation in historic preservation worldwide. "Definitely best practices are being reconsidered," explains Alan Hess, a Los Angeles architect, author, and former San Jose Mercury News architecture critic who advocates for 20th century historic preservation. "The beginning of the historic preservation movement was about dealing with materials which were mostly hand-made or hand-constructed. It was restoration based upon bricklaying and carpentry. If you got a rotten piece of wood, then you want to recreate that by hand just as it was made by hand. The big change, however, was with modern architecture, which comes along late 19th, early 20th century. The whole idea is industry, technology, mass production. You have a completely different sense of construction, materials, and therefore authenticity. For this building and postmodernism, the theory or concept of the building in many ways is more important than the structure or materials. I understand why Graves would have said make it out of whatever you need to get it built. He was under a lot of pressure, and he perhaps made compromises about long-term maintenance. But in terms of saving a postmodern building, it's the overall impact, the color, the symmetrical arrangement of the windows. The various historical references that give the building its historic character: that's what deserves to be maintained."

In early July of 2017, the Landmarks Commission in a 4-0 vote approved the Portland Building reconstruction plan. "We were very pleased," Carla Weinheimer recalls. "We got the approval we needed on all the exterior elements we were proposing: the larger tile, the window cladding, the materiality. Leading up to the hearing, a lot of feedback suggested it could go either way. Each commissioner was wrestling with a different aspect. But they felt the overall intent was in keeping with the historic integrity that was the intention of the architect." "If you listen to the recording," notes Jo Wells, "Commissioner [Matthew] Roman after it passed said something to the effect of, 'The preservation ground is shaking right now.'"

"With a sense of joy," adds Weinheimer in response. "He saw this as a bigger issue than just how close did you get to the original fabric. It was an important moment in preservation history in his world. The approval, though unanimous, did come with conditions, the most significant of which was placing air-handling units for the HVAC system on the roof. In a very uncommon design move, the original Graves design had hidden

away the air-handling equipment on an otherwise-unused second floor. His original design had placed a series of small pavilions on the roof instead; while they had not been included in the final building, the equipment stayed in its place. In the DLR Group redesign, the equipment was moved to the middle of the roof in order to reclaim the second floor as part of an enlarged double-height lobby.

"It's true that from several blocks away, from certain angles, you will be able to see some of the air handling units from the street," says Tom Rinehart. "But to acquire additional space, and, much more importantly, save employees from breathing air pumped in from the bus mall, it was an easy decision."

A PATH FORWARD

By nature, historic preservation is always a balancing act between idealism and pragmatism. As buildings age, they must be maintained with integrity. But if owners are limited in how they can restore historic buildings, they may be discouraged from restoration. "If there's not an acceptable way to keep these buildings functioning and performing, that will threaten them more quickly than anything else," Erica Ceder says. There has to be support or recognition for the practical obstacles. "You have to be able to offer a path forward."

Perhaps restoration projects like the Portland Building, even if it does someday lose its National Register listing—or maybe especially if it does—can help build the case for systemic change. "I think it's time to revamp the Secretary of Interior's standards or create a different set of standards for post-World War II buildings," Engeman says, "because I don't think they work."

> "Maybe in the end, the best compliment one can give to this restoration of an internationally-renowned postmodern architectural landmark is that the approach is itself, postmodern: a fresh take on how we interact with history."

"I think one of the biggest accomplishments is what this project potentially does for the practice of preservation," Michael Lewis says. "I really feel like we revived the same kind of spirit that occurred when they built this building. Our whole preservation practice is going to have to evolve, just like our buildings evolved. And that's what our community has to understand."

Michael Lewis observes a pressure test being performed on the newly installed curtainwall to ensure that the system does not leak.

Photo courtesy DLR Group

A transformed conference room window frames a stunning view of Portlandia

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

CHAPTER 5:

TRANSFORMATION *of* THE WORKPLACE

Although the Portland Building's façade gets the most attention—be it for the colorful, postmodern style of Michael Graves's original design or the longtime leaking that eventually prompted over-cladding its concrete façade in a new material—the biggest metamorphosis was arguably inside.

"It's always harder for people to feel interior transformation," Carla Weinheimer said prior to the project's completion. "But the interior story is really the revelation."

Though the Portland Building brought Michael Graves international renown, his firm actually did not design the interior. That commission instead went to local firm Zimmer Gunsul Frasca. More importantly, the interior was a challenge from the start because of the same budget and energy-code constraints that compromised the exterior. But since nearly all of the defining characteristics of the historic postmodern design were on the outside, and the switch to clear glass was accepted, the interior renovation was freer to pursue contemporary approaches to office design. This would be an outright transformation that even many of the Portland Building's longtime occupants didn't think was possible.

A CHANGE PROJECT

New glass walls at the pedestrian level creates visual connection into City of Portland spaces and services.

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA Portlandia statue by Raymond Kaskey

At the same time, City of Portland leaders saw an accompanying opportunity in how bureaus worked together to serve the public. "It's not just a construction project, it's an opportunity to change and improve how we work together as employees on behalf of Portlanders," says Tom Rinehart, the city's chief administrative officer during the reconstruction project. "We took the opportunity to use the design to foster more collaboration and unity among our varied services."

To make that happen, though, the building had to let in the light. The dark exterior glass that had irked Michael Graves at the building's 1982 opening was not only an aesthetic disappointment. It and the small overall array of windows meant that City of Portland administrative offices would be largely devoid of natural light and views. In subsequent years, scientific studies confirmed the human cost of such design choices: that from schools to offices to hospitals, humans are more alert, productive and happy when given regular access to natural light as well as visual connections to the outside.

The building's Fifth Avenue entrance was perhaps even more uninviting than the upstairs offices. Lining the ground-floor loggia with retail spaces meant the lobby was narrow and lacking natural light: almost like a hallway leading to the elevator core. Upstairs, City of Portland administrative offices were practically cave-like, relying on a tiny band of square windows lining each floor and a robust array of fluorescent lights mounted from drop ceilings. If the postmodern exterior was decorative and fanciful, the inside was grim — so much so that many City of Portland employees doubted whether a welcome administrative space could be created.

The original entry lobby restored to Michael Graves's original color scheme and lighting design.

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

Ultimately the interior renovation was part of a change in philosophy: that the Portland Building would no longer be about style over function. "The building was designed from the outside-in. There was not a lot of thought put into the human aspect of the building," explains DLR Group Principal Jeremy Reding, who heads the firm's global workplace team. "A lot of what we're doing is humanizing it, and making it about the user experience, both in terms of the public coming into the building and as a service-first model. It's going to change how the public interacts with the city, and how employees interact with the space."

LETTING IN THE LIGHT

The redesign started on the ground floor, where retail spaces along the north and south ends of the covered loggia had long proven unsuccessful. To members of the public looking for help with a bill or a permit, it was also confusing to know where to go and how to find help.

"It was designed in a time where you thought having retail at the bottom would activate it, but it was kind of weird retail space. It really closed the building off to the public," Reding explains, adding that in the new design, the team asked, "How can we get a more transparent, open base that, even when you're just walking by or driving by, did not feel like the city's hiding stuff from you, but instead is being open and transparent?"

In DLR Group's new design, former retail spaces have been replaced with transparent public space. Today light pours in from all sides, with more than double the square footage. To the right, visitors can quickly find customer service counters for easy access to public service. To

Formerly enclosed retail spaces have been transformed into a new public service experience for the City of Portland.

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

A new window opening out to Chapman Square Park replaces the original parking garage entry.

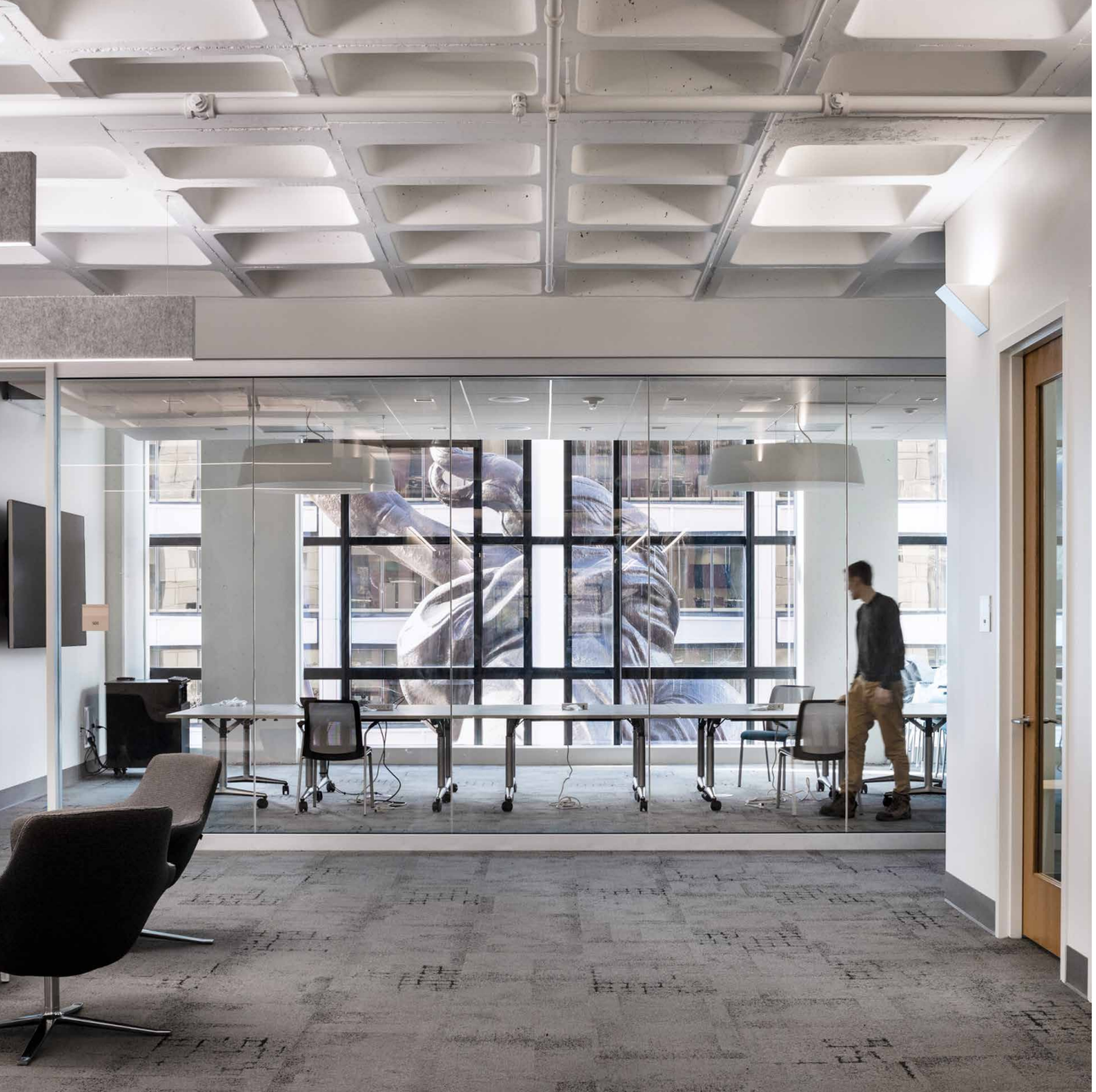
Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

the left is a new event space. Towards the elevator lobby, a grand new staircase leads the public directly to the conference center on the second floor. The historic elevator lobby has been refinished to reflect the original colors and finishes.

But it's not just a physical change the new lobby enables. "As the downtown municipal service center, the opportunity with this project is to change how community members see the complexity of dealing with the city," Rinehart says. "We wanted to use that opportunity to create one customer service desk on the first floor. Any customer can get any service for anything. Instead of making them ask four or five questions about where to go, there's one place for customer service. If a city employee needs to be called down they'll be called down. All the second floor conference centers are shared, for that purpose." If a member of the public is there to pay two different bills, they can be taken care of in one place.

One of the Portland Building's less-beloved original features was a small underground parking garage, accessed via a garage door on Fourth Avenue. The garage opening, though it sloped down to the building's basement, had to be large enough that it necessitated removing another aspect of Graves's design: a large window providing views across the lobby, out past Fourth, and to the park blocks beyond.

During the redesign process, when the City of Portland committed to eliminating vehicle parking in the basement, "It seemed like a natural opportunity to rectify that side of the building," Erica Ceder remembers. "It was just always a shame to put it in this archway for the parking garage and ramp—that should be a celebrated moment in the façade."



Transparency on all levels of the building creates a light-filled, open workspace.

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

Indeed, because of the garage, the Portland Building was like a house without a view of its own back yard. When that happens, it's not just the view that's lost but the broader sense of connection — and in this case, it showed. "One of the biggest issues people had with the Portland Building was that walking into the lobby just seemed oppressive," Ceder adds. "You were walking into a relatively small space that was opaque on all sides."

Now, however, a new wall of glass means that when entering the Portland Building, one looks through the ground floor to the park beyond. It's the kind of axial connection that classical architecture is based on, and it was surprisingly fundamental to Graves's ground floor. The DLR Group design creates that. "You no longer feel cut off from the outside," Ceder says. "You have that visual continuity. You're looking through the axis of the building straight to the opening on Fourth. You can see trees, people. It has a connection it didn't have before."

In the renovated Portland Building, there is vastly more natural light penetrating the new interior. Glass technology has evolved enough since the early 1980s that it's no longer necessary to darkly shade the material to keep out unwanted heat gain. Today the renovated Portland Building's glass appears completely clear. Its original drop ceilings were also removed, which raised the overall height of each floor space and, even more importantly, when given a fresh coat of white paint helps bounce incoming sunlight around the room.

"It allowed us this bright, open experience," Ceder explains. "It's still relatively short. It's only a little over 13-feet from the floor to the top of the ceiling: not high compared to other office buildings. So the removal of the drop ceiling and the bright colors allowed us to create this illusion that our floor plates are spread apart more than they actually are."

Flexible conference rooms offer a variety of options to accommodate less formal and more collaborative gatherings.

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

AN ACTIVE WORKSPACE

The Portland Building Reconstruction project focused on better support for collaboration between bureaus.

Image courtesy DLR Group

For the City of Portland bureaus filling the Portland Building, the renovation was a chance to bring decisions about operations under one banner. "Before the reconstruction, each bureau managed its own furniture, which was both inefficient and inequitable among service areas," Tom Rinehart explains. What's more, bureaus can be fluid about how much square footage they occupy. "If the water bureau shrinks in size, we can move people from another bureau into that space a lot more easily."

Previously, bureaus had altered spaces, in some cases literally building walls between themselves and other bureaus, so much so that the HVAC system even became strained. Now, those walls have come down in both a figurative and literal sense, with all furniture and interiors changes overseen by one entity and more openness encouraged. "In many ways it's modern best practices," Rinehart says. "But since the City has been so decentralized in management we've been behind." The open-office configuration, coupled with a cohesive space-management plan, allows the new Portland Building to hold not 1,300 employees, as it had before, but over 1700 employees, reducing dependence on leased office space. Rinehart estimates $25 million in cost savings over 25 years.

Over the past decade, open-office configurations have become the norm, with cubicle walls and individual workstations de-emphasized in favor of clustered desks that allow space for a greater variety of places to work and collaborate. At the Portland Building, leaders favored a hybrid solution.

New open office environment takes advantage of the increased daylight.

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

A new graphic scheme creates unique identities for each floor with images of Oregon environmental landscapes.

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

"We call it an active workspace," Rinehart says. "It's different from open office. That's an important distinction, because people were nervous. But you still have a workstation of your own, just a little smaller, and there will be more places to do your job: a café with food, small-group workspaces, small-focus rooms. The world has changed a lot around the technology we have. We're trying to evolve from people thinking they're only doing their job if they're in their assigned workspace. We're saying to people, 'The whole building is your workspace.' We no longer want individual workspaces with 20 plants, 70 boxes, reams of paper. That's not the way we're going to do business, and that's an adjustment for some people. But the bottom line is the active workspace is allowing us to bring several hundred more people into the building."

The interior design was also continually refined, first using virtual reality to give city leaders a sense of how the new building would look and feel, and then as reconstruction progressed, "we actually were able to test a lot of the furniture systems there as well, to find what worked or didn't work," Reding says. "It was a chance to get feedback from people, to have them vote on what they liked and didn't like."

PLACES TO COME TOGETHER

Even before the global COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020, the trend toward open offices had seen increased emphasis on collaborative spaces such as conference rooms and breakout spaces, as well as quiet places to work solo, and amenity spaces where employees can recharge, exercise, or socialize. In the commercial office market, buildings with gathering spaces beyond just the rentable square footage reap higher rents and help companies attract employees. That's a different world from what Michael Graves and his team designed over 40 years ago.

New employee support spaces provide places for employees to recharge as well as options for drop-in or focused work.

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

"With more and more offices being changed to open offices, social gathering places are what's important," says Patrick Burke of Michael Graves Architecture & Design. "I think that actually puts more importance on the lobby, the lounges. It has less to do with the building than how we work today."

In the redesigned Portland Building offices, each floor shares two medium size conference rooms, a large conference room, 18 flexible rooms that can be used as offices or meeting rooms, and six focus rooms intended for heads-down work, phone calls, or one-on-one conversations. These rooms are intended for use by all city employees, not solely for those working with the bureau on that floor. And because so much of the dark or blocked façade glass was cutting off views, on many floors these new perimeter conference rooms on the west side of the building actually look out at the city from behind the building's famed Portlandia statue by Raymond Kaskey. On one floor, the feet of the statue are just inches beyond the glass. On another floor upstairs, the view looks from underneath a raised arm. It's unlike any conference space in the world.

Aside from meeting space, in the old Portland Building, there were even fewer spaces where employees could come together socially, away from public view. As a result, "you wouldn't see that kind of engagement and interaction between staff," Reding says. "We needed to create a space that could be theirs. If a city employee is having lunch or a coffee break, they don't want to worry about a member of the public walking in and joking, 'There's my tax dollars at work.' It's always important to create kind of a safe place where government employees can go and just be normal people like anybody else but not feel like they're on display and not feel like they're being judged constantly."

Because today's telecommunications advances allow people to work anywhere, offices increasingly include lifestyle-oriented amenities that give people some of the comforts of home and even what's known as the third place: a place to do work other than the assigned workstation, such as a cafe or lounge area. The redesigned Portland Building thus offers a number of shared spaces for different ways to recharge or relax. On the basement level, for example, vehicular parking was eliminated and now instead provides bicycle storage and locker rooms for two-wheeled commuters, thereby enabling the less-car-dependent transit choices the City of Portland actively encourages. There is also a staff gym, helping employees to not only stay healthy but avoid the expense of a private health-club membership.

The 15th floor is the renovated building's marquee shared space. Acting like a communal office penthouse, here employees can enjoy the city skyline one by one, in small or large groups. They can work quietly in sit-stand hoteling stations or additional focus rooms for more private work. For more relaxed meetings or to socialize informally, there is a lounge space with soft seating and even an electric fireplace.

"It's a place for serendipity: sharing with each other or just running into friends and colleagues," Reding says. "What comes out of that is better ways of working and happier employees."

Today, perhaps for the first time, there is a true synergy between the Portland Building's interior and exterior. Fixing the leaking façade became an opportunity to make this a transparent building in a way it had simply never been before. Today the façade looks better than ever: more vibrant color, more crisp details. Yet walking past the building, one doesn't simply see the postmodern style but the people inside as well. Michael Graves's design is even more meaningful now because it's not simply an architectural object: a wrapped present that never reveals what's behind the garlands. It's a playful conversation between past, present and future, with Graves's postmodern façade becoming a decorative stage set for the human stories playing out inside.

"You read that in the building now," Carla Weinheimer says. "This building has a wholeness about it. There's more integrity in how it's representing the City of Portland. Now the design really expresses who they are."

Flexible spaces allow employees more options for casual meetings and conversations.

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

SUSTAINABLE SPACES

The Portland Building Reconstruction Project increased daylight by 400% on average office floors.

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA

To become the kind of people-friendly space that encourages collaboration, enables productivity and fosters employee retention, the Portland Building couldn't just add natural light, an expanded lobby and open offices. The design needed to meet the highest standards for sustainable design. It needed to be more energy and resource-efficient than ever before and, perhaps even more importantly, must promote human health. That's why the design-construction team and their City of Portland client pursued certification from two of the industry's most respected rating systems: WELL and LEED.

The WELL Building Standard is a performance-based system for measuring, certifying, and monitoring building performance features such as air, water, and light that impact human health and well-being. Administered by the International WELL Building Institute (IWBI), a public benefit corporation, WELL is composed of over 100 different design features applied to each certified building.

"Once the certification process is complete, the Portland Building will be one of the largest WELL-certified public building renovation projects in history," DLR Group principal Jeremy Reding says. "We worked really closely with the IWBI because they wanted to establish it as a new basis for this kind of a building. It's really user focused: it comes down to the human-experience side. They actually require ongoing training every year to make sure they keep pursuing the highest standards." The reconstruction also achieved the highest-possible Platinum rating from the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), which exceeded the City of Portland's required minimum standard of meeting LEED Gold. The renovated Portland Building was designed to be 36 percent more efficient than what the State of Oregon energy code requires, and to use 50 percent less energy compared to the pre-renovated structure.

"This building has a wholeness about it. There's more integrity in how it's representing the City of Portland. Now the design really expresses who they are."

- Carla Weinheimer

Photograph by James Ewing/JBSA
Portlandia statue by Raymond Kaskey