



Before

ARCHITECT AND ENGINEER CHISEL OFFICE JEWEL OUT OF DILAPIDATED STRUCTURE



Architect **Jeff Weinstein** met engineer Carl Howe following the Northridge Earthquake when they worked together rehabilitating several condominium projects. The two decided to pool their resources to buy and completely rebuild a dilapidated commercial structure in West Los Angeles, California into professional offices. The location is at the hub of the city's business clusters—presenting a short commute to downtown, Century City, Beverly Hills, and many other areas.

The partners formed a Limited Liability Company in May 1999 to acquire and redevelop the building, located along Motor Avenue between Twentieth Century Fox and Sony Studios. As owners, they planned on occupying the top floor of the two-story building.

The existing 2,550 sq.ft. structure (previously a restaurant and apartment) was completely gutted and transformed into 3,950 sq.ft. of creative offices with exposed structural, mechanical and lighting systems, a rear outdoor patio, a light-filled clerestory second floor, and parking for seven cars.

The street façade seeks to capture the spirit of the Art Deco era in Los Angeles. The building becomes more contemporary along its side and rear elevations in keeping with its context and economy. The second floor was custom designed by the partners to reflect their individual styles.

Because of their experience in project management and engineering consulting, Carl and Jeff chose to subcontract the job themselves, acting as general contractor. Bidding each trade out to multiple contractors was time-consuming, but cost less due to savings in profit, overhead and general conditions.

Collaborating on the design presented a major challenge. Neither partner could afford to jeopardize their current practice or clients during the development process, but they had to maintain ongoing communication. No less than four architect friends contributed their design expertise on matters relating to interiors, lighting, exterior elevations, and signage. Maintaining construction costs within an acceptable range required a deliberate strategy and flexibility, with frequent discussions to reach agreement.

This process tested their friendship, and challenged their commitment to build the project profitably and provide a well-designed work environment. Both partners learned from the process and its success that architects, engineers and contractors, as well as other professionals, may be well suited to own and/or develop their own facilities. The prestige and success associated with owning your own business address can translate well into expanding the range of professional services and new growth opportunities.

Motor City Partners LLC completed the project in April 2000, exceeding preliminary budget estimates and scheduling, but succeeding nonetheless. High quality ground floor tenants, positive impact on the streetscape and neighborhood, and quality office space for the owners themselves are all very tangible benefits. The Motor City building represents a successful urban infill commercial development and a smart investment!

Photos:

Carl Howe, PE

**Motor City Building
Los Angeles, CA**

Size of project:
3,950 sq.ft.

Number of units:
3 office suites

Size range of units:
554 sq.ft., 1,090 sq.ft., 1,606 sq.ft.

Cost of project:
\$525,000

Site size:
25'x150'

Cost per sq.ft.:
\$130

Developer:
Motor City Partners, LLC

Architect:
Jeffrey Phillip Weinstein, AIA
Martin Gelber, FAIA



Contractor:

Built to Suit

Engineer:

C.W. Howe & Associates

Interior Designer:

Ryan Coultis

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