



Durham on the Rise

Architecture and the Arts Herald Durham's Future

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Visions of Durham

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By Diane Lea

In the first decade of the 21st century, Durham — the state's fourth largest city — is redefining itself once more. Situated in North Carolina's Piedmont Crescent on the edge of the Old Belt bright leaf tobacco zone, Durham is perhaps our most diverse city. It is a city shaped by the forces of tobacco, textiles, big business, great philanthropy, advanced education, technology and medicine, and now a resurgence of all aspects of the arts.

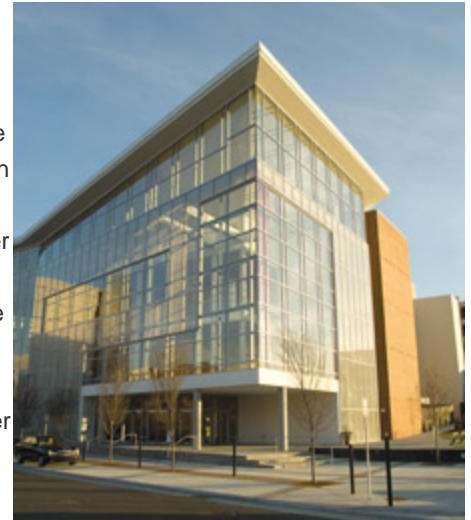
The city's story began in 1854 (only slightly more than 150 years ago), with the arrival of the North Carolina Railroad at a depot called variously Durhamville Station, Durham's Station and finally Durham. Named for Dr. Bartlett Snipes Durham, whose offer of a four-acre parcel for a depot was accepted by the railroad company, Durham Station was located at the southeast corner of present day Corcoran and Peabody streets in a portion of eastern Orange County that would become part of Durham County in 1881. In 1856, Dr. Durham sold his property to the Rev. John A. McMannen and his son Dr. Charles T. McMannen — who are said to have greatly improved the railroad hotel only to sell the depot and the hotel to RF Morris in 1856. Morris constructed a new hotel facing Corcoran Street and opened a small factory for the manufacture of smoking tobacco, which was later purchased by JR Green, a Person County farmer. And as they say, the rest is history.

In April 1865, the Union Gen. William T. Sherman got off the train in Durham with a coded telegram in his pocket reporting the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. As recounted by John Baxton Flowers III and Marguerite Schumann in *Bull Durham and Beyond: A Touring Guide to City and County*, Sherman left his men to camp near the depot where the Confederate soldiers were quartered and rode to meet Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston. The two negotiated the military treaty that ended the Civil War in the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida at a modest farmhouse owned by the Bennett family, today a reconstructed historic site. While the generals negotiated, their troops enjoyed the fine bright leaf tobacco they had looted from the conveniently nearby tobacco factory. After the soldiers of both the Blue and the Gray returned to their homes in different parts of the country, they continued to write the

station master asking for more of “that good Durham tobacco,” later patented as Bull Durham Plug Tobacco. Soon a major new industry was thriving in Durham.

Uncovering Past Riches

Muirhead Plaza (also known as Five Points), situated near the intersection of Main and Chapel Hill streets, features a magnificent bronze sculpture of a bull in recognition of the famous advertising logo adopted by Green and the man who became his partner shortly before his death, William T. Blackwell. Blackwell patented the Bull Durham logo and became the arch rival of another tobacco manufacturer, the Duke family, headed by Civil War veteran Washington Duke. The Dukes’ fame and fortune, based on tobacco and later on electric power, would become the philanthropic bedrock upon which Duke University and many other Durham institutions and agencies were founded. The vigorous, muscular bull with nostrils flaring, remains one of the most enduring emblems of the city of Durham, which until the late 20th century remained The City of Tobacco. In the late 1980s, as the once great tobacco companies were folding their tents and letting go thousands of workers, Durham gradually replaced the Bull’s moniker with The City of Medicine, giving a nod to the vast medical center that developed as part of Duke University, the school so carefully nurtured by Washington Duke’s son James Buchanan Duke.



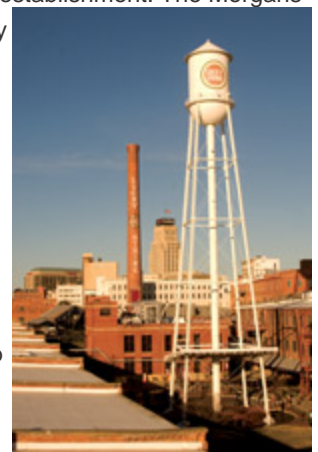
With such colorful beginnings, it is appropriate that among Durham’s impressive architecture is the city’s premier collection of tobacco manufacturing buildings, the most significant in North Carolina. Interestingly enough, the renovation and adaptive reuse of these buildings, much of which has been carried on by Durham-based adaptive reuse architect Eddie Belk, AIA, has led the way to the architectural and economic renaissance of downtown Durham. In 1981, the adaptation of the Watts and Yuille Warehouses, built between 1900 and 1904 by the American Tobacco Company for storing, aging and fermenting tobacco for cigarette manufacture, was completed by the SEHED Development Corporation with Eddie Belk as project architect. Located at the corner of West Main and Gregson streets, the Brightleaf Square complex incorporates retail, dining, art galleries and office space. The two Italianate-style warehouse structures parallel each other to form an interior courtyard suitable for various events and activities. Brightleaf Square courtyard was recently remodeled by the firm of Roughton Nickelson De Luca, Architects to provide easier visual and pedestrian access to the shops and restaurants.

More recently, Durham-based Scientific Properties with Belk Architects has transformed the immense castle-like complex of the Golden Belt Manufacturing Company (1900-1930), located on Morning Glory Street, into an arts centered adaptive reuse, which accommodates artists’ work-live lofts, studios, art galleries, offices and restaurants. A music component is being added to the rear courtyard.

An early tenant of Brightleaf Square, Durham’s enduring retail establishment Morgan Imports, created in 1969 by Durham native Richard Morgan, is now ensconced in the old Durham Laundry building, built in 1926 and located across Gregson Street from Brightleaf. In 1991, Morgan and his wife Jacqueline, strong supporters of historic preservation, acquired the building, renovated it — again with Belk Architecture — and eventually moved their eclectic contemporary and Asian-themed retail establishment. The Morgans and Belk Architecture have continued the renovation of nearby buildings, including the former Dillon Supply Company next door. The mixed-use complex known as Peabody Square features retail and restaurants.

American Tobacco Centerpiece Of Revival

The centerpiece of downtown Durham’s tobacco warehouse district is the American Tobacco Campus, described by Catherine Bishir and Michael Southern in *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Piedmont North Carolina* as a landmark in industrial history. The renovation and adaptive reuse of the 1 million-square-foot complex was undertaken by Jim Goodman, president and CEO of Capitol Broadcasting Company. Goodman, a baseball fan, had earlier purchased the Durham Bulls baseball team as part of a strategy to create a Triangle Central Park near the airport. However, when Durham stepped up to the plate to build the new \$16 million Durham Bulls Ball Park, Goodman moved in 1999 to take on the restoration of the deteriorating American Tobacco Company buildings adjacent to the Park. Goodman engaged Belk and Belk Architecture to transform the historic complex. Described by Bishir, the campus is an extensive collection of functionalism, exuberant brickwork and medieval inspired historicism.

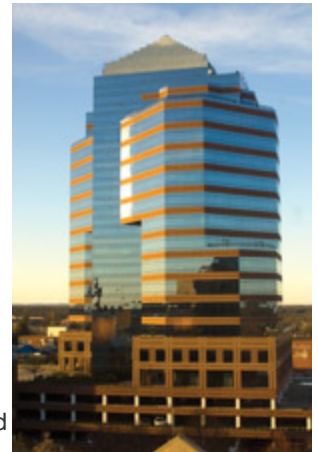


The best part is that the earliest and most venerable tobacco building in Durham is part of the restored complex. The Bull Durham Tobacco Factory, built in 1874 for Green's partner Blackwell, is a four-story, Italianate-style building, which represents the earliest era of tobacco manufacturing architecture. A residential component of the American Tobacco Campus is being developed around the old Bull Durham Factory. Art and sculpture are displayed everywhere inside and outside in the American Tobacco Campus, some of it from Goodmon's own extensive collection. There are plans to host regular art tours.

The American Tobacco Campus is billed as downtown Durham's Entertainment District and is the venue for a variety of musical events, concerts, live performances, receptions and other programs often held outdoors on the complex's centrally located amphitheatre beneath the iconic Lucky Strike Water Tower. It is a perfect companion piece to the new 2800-seat Durham Performing Arts Center (DPAC), located across Blackwell Street from the American Tobacco Campus and connected to it by a pedestrian plaza featuring a 30-foot public sculpture by world-renowned Spanish artist Jaume Plensa. Named "The Bridge to the Sky," the light sculpture sends shafts of light 10,000 feet into the air, illuminating the evening sky and playing off the glittering curtain-walled DPAC.

Performing Arts Center Signals New Era

DPAC was designed by Phil Szostak, FAIA, (Szostak achieved the distinction of becoming a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 2008) in cooperation with the city of Durham and with extensive public comment from arts organizations and other Durham stakeholders. Szostak is co-developer with Texas-based Garfield and Traub, the contractor was Skanska, and theater design consultation was by Chapel Hill's William Ivey Long. DPAC is considered a model of cost-effective design and technical efficiency, especially when compared to much larger and more expensive facilities such as the \$145 million Cobb Energy Performing Arts Center, which recently opened in Atlanta. "We've built probably the most efficient theater in the country," says Szostak. "We had to be ruthless about what we could and couldn't have."



DPAC is designed to host the classic traveling roadshow companies that have historically been audience favorites in Raleigh's Memorial Auditorium. Roadshows bring their own technical equipment so it is the stage and technical support that the local performing arts center must provide. Szostak is particularly proud of the center's interesting horseshoe-shaped seating hall and the resilient stage floor. "A springy floor is a must for the American Dance Festival companies, which will appear here every summer," he explains.

DPAC's angled rising interior staircases appear sculptural when viewed from outside, and the building's interior benefits from the sensitive blending of fine matched wood finishes, steel structural elements, glass panels, ceramic tile accents and lush fabrics. The subtle play of materials and textures inspired some visitors to describe DPAC as an elegant Japanese tea house. For Durham's cultural audiences and arts supporters, DPAC will provide a red-carpeted Donor Room with elegantly frosted glass walls and stylish lobbies that can be set for dining.

In close proximity to DPAC, at 303 S. Roxboro St., stands another turn-of-the-century tobacco building, the Venable Tobacco Company Warehouse, called by Bishir and Southern, "the only intact example of the many independent warehouses of the late 19th and early 20th centuries." The firm purchased tobacco in local sales houses, re-dried it and shipped around the world. The Venable (another Scientific Properties/Belk Architecture adaptive reuse) recently became part of the arts buzz in Durham as the new home of Somerhill Gallery. After almost 30 years in Chapel Hill, owner Joe Rowand moved Somerhill to Durham to take advantage of Durham's burgeoning arts scene and to pursue his interest in using traditional buildings in modern ways. Rowand touts fellow newcomers such as The Art Institute of Raleigh-Durham, which has begun classes in a downtown Durham storefront. "There are more than 100 arts organizations in Durham," says Rowand, who praises a new book on Durham's arts, *Brighter Leaves: Celebrating the Arts in Durham*, North Carolina. Published in 2008 by the Historic Preservation Society of Durham, the work by six local authors chronicles the history of Durham's arts community.

Of particular note architecturally are the Carolina Theatre and the Durham Arts Council, two veterans of Durham's early efforts to preserve and adapt historic buildings to arts-related venues. The 1926 Beaux Arts-style Durham Auditorium, at 309 W. Morgan St., has, like the city of Durham, redefined itself many times since its first incarnation in the 1920s as the city's auditorium. Designed by the prestigious Washington firm of Milburn and Heister, the Durham Auditorium was a venue for vaudeville acts and live theater. Converted some 10 years later to a movie palace, its glorious Corinthian pilasters and entablature of floral decoration matched the glamour that the decade of the 1930s brought to the silver screen. It was successfully renovated and expanded throughout the later part of the 20th century and now, as the Carolina Theatre, offers live performances in Fletcher Hall and art and independent films in two adjacent cinemas.

Close by the Carolina Theatre is the (former) City Hall, now the Durham Arts Council at 120 Morris St. Remodeled by Milburn and Heister in a neoclassical style compatible with the Carolina Theatre, the building was adapted as the Durham Arts Council when a new City Hall was built in the 1970s. The Durham Arts Council is truly the heart of the Durham Arts Community. As a nonprofit organization, it supports the arts through classes, exhibits, festivals and grants. The building, which has been tastefully adapted to its new use throughout the past three decades, features classrooms, studio and rehearsal spaces, two theaters, and three galleries, including the CCB Gallery managed by the Durham Art Guild.

As Durham expands its persona to emphasize its role as the arts center of the Triangle, it is important to appreciate the city's architecturally interesting array of fine buildings that now serve as venues for the arts. From the Italianate towers of Brightleaf Square to the glittering glass walls of the new Durham Performing Arts Center to the Beaux Arts display of the Carolina Theatre, and the restrained neoclassicism of the Durham Arts Council, Durham's architecture continues as one of the city's greatest assets.