

Reprinted From

The New York Times

REAL ESTATE DESK

SUNDAY, JUNE 30, 2002

In The Region / Long Island

Tired-Looking Buildings Are Getting Makeovers

Architects' creative approaches to refacing buildings in good sites.

By CAROLE PAQUETTE

MANY of Long Island's structurally sound commercial buildings that have gone out of style are getting makeovers as architects play the role of plastic surgeons.

Commercial building in Nassau and Suffolk Counties peaked in the 1980's when the island experienced its major growth in office buildings, according to Roy Fedelem, principal planner at the Suffolk County Department of Planning. "A lot of the buildings were put in the right location, so now owners of these aging buildings have two choices, tear it down or renovate," he said.

Many building owners are choosing to reface their buildings, keeping the original structure intact and adding a new covering, or "skin," said Philip Monastero, a principal in the Baldassano Architectural Group in Ronkonkoma.

The process, which often includes adding insulation and energy-saving thermal windows, is cheaper than rebuilding, and there are fewer zoning issues to deal with, he said. While there are some constraints, such as working with an established size and shape, the same creative approach is used as with a new structure.

Of Long Island's 362 Class A and B office buildings of 20,000 square feet or greater, which are tracked for availability by Insignia/ESG, 15 percent have undergone refacing in the last decade, in some cases in conjunction with additions and other remodeling, said Martin L. Lomazow, senior

managing director of the real estate services company. "It is a continuing trend that is increasing the asset value and turning many of the buildings into Class A," he said.

In refacing, architects frequently use curtain walls and Styrofoam shapes to create a style indicative of a new era. "Locally, everyone is going for a warmer look, very inviting as opposed to large buildings of glass," said Oriana Nicoletti, an architect based in Mineola.

The exteriors of buildings built in the last 40 years tend to reveal the decades when they were built, Mr. Monastero explained.

The 1960's and 1970's favored a monolithic look using one material, usually flat glass. There was no variation. Buildings from the 1980's tend to have a more traditional style with pediments, columns and pitched roofs, but in a more modern way with, for example, big windows.

"Now, we are going back to a modern style and materials, such as glass, but we are using it in a more creative way," he said. "We are using more details, a variety of colored glasses and window framings. Also, we might relate a building more to its surroundings."

ONE of the prevailing methods of refacing is the use of curtain walls — walls bearing only their own weight, constructed of sections of panels, usually a combination of aluminum, glass and a variety of materials, according to Thomas Fitzsimmons, a Great Neck architect. "You can put them up in large sections to create an exterior in one fell swoop," he said.

Another popular process is "an exterior insulation finish system" that allows for a variety of designs, Mr. Fitzsimmons said. "It is structurally sound and updates the look with new color, texture and design. The

building gets a totally new skin."

With this system, a Styrofoam base that contains insulation material is attached to the original exterior of the building. Carved Styrofoam shapes that make up design elements such as cornices, columns and other decorative details are added to the Styrofoam wall. Several layers of acrylic stucco finish are then applied over the entire surface, with the various design elements painted in different colors.

Mr. Fitzsimmons, who has used this method previously in two Great Neck office buildings, is currently using it in the refacing of a three-story Ramada Inn in Douglaston, just west of the Nassau border in Queens.

The brick building, which was built in the 1960's, will have a new facade including windows, which will be the same size as the originals — two feet high by five feet wide — but in a different style. The original windows were "the hopper style," where only the bottom two feet opened to the inside, he said. The new ones will be of sliding glass, which will open to their full height.

Cornices at the top of the roof and a central pediment will be added. The main walls will be colored beige with small square accents in forest green and with a cream horizontal band.

"The building will get a whole new look by adding these elements," Mr. Fitzsimmons said. "It will be rather eclectic, with a contemporary flair."

In Mineola, about five miles east, a 50-year-old building — which had a major addition constructed in the 1970's to create a 15,000-square-foot, two-and-a-half story building with a full basement — underwent a renovation six months ago. Included in the project was a completely new facade created with the Styrofoam-stucco method.

The original building had a "brick face