



[The Bright Side Episode 12: Historic Preservation](#)

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Richard Hosey Welcome to The Bright Side, the show where we shed light on the people, places and stories that make Michigan great. I'm Richard Hosey, and today we're filming at the David Whitney building, Detroit's latest large-scale renovation project, which will open in the fall of 2014 as a 136 room loft hotel and 105 luxury apartments.

In today's episode we'll search Detroit and beyond for historic buildings being used in creative new ways, and we'll find out what it takes to do historic preservation.

Our first stop is Old Town Lansing at the newly restored Comfort Station. We'll find out what historic preservation is and some examples around the state that you may recognize.

---Michigan Historic Preservation Network---

Nancy Finegood Old Town's awesome. People really appreciate the historic nature of the neighborhood. You don't see the same type of activity going on in a strip mall.

If you walk around here on a Saturday, it truly is a neighborhood. People stop and they greet each other and they know each other.

Historic preservation is generally about saving and protecting historic resources. People think it's just about buildings, but it could be bridges or statues or gates or fences. And it's about saving neighborhoods and protecting neighborhoods that are comprised of historic properties.

Probably the first building most school children even recognize is the state capitol. I don't know if you're aware of it, but they actually wanted to tear the capitol down and build a new one, oh, I think about 15 years ago.

There are many, many, many historic buildings on Belle Island, Detroit. There's the conservancy. There's the aquarium, which has recently reopened.

The Christman Building: beautifully historic. They've maintained and kept the inner circular staircase, which is glorious, and the tile work is beautiful. But if you go into the offices, they are very, very modern, very useable. State of the art. Triple platinum LEED certified. The first in the world. Yeah. So if anyone says you can't use a historic building to bring it up to current infrastructure, no no no they're wrong.

Michigan Historic Preservation Network is thirty-three years old, and we educate and we advocate for historic preservation all over the state. We do workshops, we do job training. We don't often stand in front of bulldozers, but we've done that once.

This is my... probably my favorite building in Lansing. It's the Network's first – very first – acquisition and the first rehab that we've done, and the building is... it was originally a comfort station along the train line. It was built in 1913 for under \$30,000 in three months in the winter. Can you imagine now building anything in the winter in three months, much less for that amount of money, and it's stood here for 100 years. For 100 years really with not much change or maintenance.

People seem to think that it's about our past and our history. Well, that's only a small part of it. It's truly about our future. It's a whole lot less expensive to rehab a building, particularly with the available incentives, than it is to build new. And of course, they last a whole lot longer.

It's about jobs. When you rehab a building, you normally use local labor instead of labor from out of the area. You use and reuse local materials.

It's about people. It's not just about the buildings.

Michigan Historic Preservation Network
mhpn.org

Richard Hosey The next feature takes us to historic homes around Detroit restored by the Detroit Land Bank Authority.

---Detroit Land Bank Authority---

Juanita Jones We are in the fabulous Boston-Edison Historic District in Detroit. This neighborhood is comprised of over 900 units, 36 blocks. It's one of the largest historic districts in the nation and it's still in tact. You know, it's still in tact. You'd have to look really hard to find vacant lots in this neighborhood, and that is a gem in and of itself inside little old Detroit.

The stories you always hear about are always... everything is demolished, everything is vacant, there's nothing there, there's no "there" there. Well, here's our "there." So we wanted to preserve it.

In this area we rehabbed 13 homes and you're looking at two of them that we did and spent a significant investment in. That property was bought under a mortgage foreclosure, and this one was bought under tax foreclosure. So that's how we acquired all the properties. A lot of people are interested in how we came to acquire the assets that we did, and pretty much that's it. It was either a mortgage foreclosure or a tax foreclosure.

This house in particular was actually fire damaged very badly, to the extent that the whole first floor on this side of the house had collapsed into the basement.

Families have a choice – many choices – to go outside the city of Detroit to get larger homes, more elaborate homes, etcetera, in the suburbs. So we don't want to lose those folks, and actually we want to entice those folks that are in the suburbs to come back. The great way to do that is to save these properties that... you can't rebuild them anymore. You're talking about a million dollars plus to rebuild some of these properties.

When I walk through and I see things like the dental molding, fabulous crown molding that's a foot long, you know, it just excites me because it's visually stunning. You can't get it anywhere else.

We've actually sold all of our properties in this neighborhood. So we brought in 13 new homeowners to this area.

When we do this work we want to create sustainable affordable housing. So not just earth friendly, but friendly on the operations side for the families. We supplied all the properties with Energy Star qualified appliances. We have a couple units here where we installed a geothermal system. We reclaimed hardwood floors. Where we

could we kept the original wood windows. If we had to replace windows we replaced with wood windows.

So we looked at every component that we could and tried to make the smartest decision about the end user and whether or not that product was friendly to the earth. Because we think it all goes together. If you're going to preserve it, you can't just try to preserve it for today or this month. You've got to try and preserve it for the next 100 years so that this 100 year old asset continues to live on and continues to grow new generations and new families.

Detroit Land Bank Authority
detroitlandbank.org

Richard Hosey Next we go to Coldwater to see an example of a historic property before redevelopment.

---The Kerr Building---

Keith Baker One, it takes time. One it takes a lot of financing. And two, if you run into an economic situation like 2008 and 2009, that doesn't assist you either.

With essentially three facades or half a block, just the sheer size of the building itself lends its own challenges.

Jennifer Wingard This is commonly known as the Kerr building. It includes a building built by the Kerr family in the late 1800's and a building on the other end built by the Mills family about the same time. The middle building right behind you is a building that connected those two buildings and was built in about 1949.

Keith Baker So the third story of this building was a fraternal lodge of some sort, and this was a ballroom.

The eastern third of the building and the western third of the building were freestanding buildings and they then spanned the building with a roof – the two buildings with a roof because you can then see the outdoor advertising on the exterior walls.

Jennifer Wingard We can't do the buildings according to any one period because there's so many periods going on. But, we can take it back to a typical period and that's what we intend to do. That means outside you'll see a lot of aluminum fascia. That will all come down. But we won't try to restore the buildings, we'll try to rehab it. So we won't be faking cornices the way we think they were or the way we got that information from pictures. It'll be left as is.

Keith Baker Downtown has a lot of traditional historic buildings, both two and three story. So we want to maintain the buildings that we have that are older in nature for historic preservation purposes, but also for an urban feel, an urban context. Not turning it into a parking lot or even turning it into a single story 21st century building that would necessarily take away from the architecture of the Tibbits or the architecture of Taylor's Stationers across the street or any of the buildings within this two block radius.

There's a community development aspect to that of trying to maintain the urban feel and the historical character of downtown.

Jennifer Wingard Downtown Coldwater is just a matter of a few blocks and this sits in what they call a premiere corner because it's right next to the Tibbits, which is on Hancehth street. Since the Tibbits has been restored, it [the Kerr Building] becomes a very likely place for a restaurant or a brewpub. The upper two floors will be residential. We'll have about 14 units.

Keith Baker We've had others that have looked at it and thought of it more in three phases or three individual buildings. Could they acquire it for just one third of the building or chop it off and just take one building and renovate that, and as time has proceeded, even I think that has crept into the city's thoughts too. But with Jennifer's assistance, I think we're going to see the full redevelopment of the building.

The Kerr Building
www.coldwater.org

Richard Hosey If you are from Flint, you'll recognize The Durant. It was one of Michigan's premiere luxury hotels and after it closed, remained vacant for many years. Today it is active as a center for events and urban style living.

---The Durant---

Alaina James Right now we are at The Durant. It is a residential property. We have 93 lofts in the heart of downtown Flint. It is pretty much the staple, the monument, when people drive downtown Flint, this is what you see.

Billy Durant opened it up I believe in the 1920's and it was a renown place for presidents, entertainers, the Jackson Five has stayed here. It was a beautiful hotel, and then it closed in – I believe in the 1920's – and was vacant until we started renovation. We had critters walking in the lower level of the building, windows blown out. The foyer was in devastation.

I get a lot of people coming back that had their honeymoons here and they want to see the ballroom and they want to just see how it is now. Because for most of their life it... it was vacant. So after they had such a special moment in their life and then having the building go vacant, it's very nice to actually come back in and see the presence of it now. See people walking in and out of the building and the life that it has now.

---The Durant was redeveloped by Karp and Associates---

Alaina James Those pillars were actually marble. They're not marble right now, but they look very similar to the original marble.

This is the gentleman that used to be an old bellhop when it was a hotel.

We opened occupancy for residential property in August of 2010. We have commercial tenants down below as well, so you can see our little courtyard area.

So we're going to see a two bedroom loft apartment, 1,139 square feet. So this apartment they actually took two hotel rooms. When it was... before they started doing the renovation the walls were here, but everything... there were lamps on the ground, there were combs. I mean, they left everything here. So they had to come in and revamp the whole property.

You can see all of downtown from this view. And you can see towards the hospitals and then the college on the east view.

For years people were wondering what they were going to do with this property, but there was no way they could've... nobody had the heart to take it down. It was... somebody had to get their hands on it and bring life back to it.

I never would've thought growing up I would have the position that I do today. I love it. It's full of life. I mean, we've been at 100% occupancy for most of the term and it's - there's no way we would've allowed for it to be torn down.

The Durant
www.thedurant.com

Richard Hosey Next we'll visit the iconic Bell Building in Detroit. Once a commercial warehouse, the building is now supportive housing and services for people who want to turn their lives around.

---NSO Bell Building---

Cortez Parrott Probably still on the streets. I would probably still be on the streets. Struggling and trying to figure out where I'm going to go, where I'm going to stay.

Joe Heaphy Currently in the building we have 155 one-bedroom units that are currently occupied by folks who were formerly homeless. This is permanent housing. It's not transitional housing. This is not a shelter.

Cortez Parrott I have my own apartment now. It's really nice. I finally get to cook my own food.

I've seen this building before, before it became what it is now. And they made a big improvement, made a big step. And I was surprised.

Joe Heaphy The Bell Building is located at 882 Oakman Boulevard and it's just one of the most well known buildings in the city of Detroit. So the building itself was built in 1929 so it is a historic structure. The bones of the building were very good, but, you know, it was not occupied, so there was a lot of wear and tear. A lot of dirt, garbage, broken windows, things like that. So we had a big job in front of us.

One of the financing sources for this was historic tax credits. So we had to preserve the lobby, we had to preserve obviously the look of the exterior. If you look at the building, every window has been replaced and is similar to the windows that were initially in the building. So a lot of time and effort and resources were spent making sure that the building continued to look the way it did.

One of the most visible aspects of the building was the Yellow Pages sign that was on the front of the building. Unfortunately that sign was structurally unsound and we had to take it down.

Sheilah Clay When NSO embarked on this process, it was very important to us that we be part of a community revitalization effort. We didn't just want to find a building someplace. We wanted it to be a community. We wanted the tenants to be part of a community.

Joe Heaphy There's a very nice sense of community at the Bell Building. The residents have really been working together. They just started a tenant council. We've included a tenant council in some of our meetings so we can get their feedback because ultimately, they are the eyes and ears for the building.

Cortez Parrott Yes, I am a part of the tenant council. The tenant council is basically based upon trying to figure out what is best for the Bell Building as far as anything that we, the tenants, may want or want to see come to the Bell Building. And as far as people that's on the tenant council, we try to make that happen.

In the future I see myself as being a hard working man in this society. Something I never did before. So it'll be truly a blessing just to have.

Joe Heaphy We think that what we're doing here is what the City of Detroit is trying to do. We're basically... we've reinvented this building just as the city is trying to reinvent itself.

NSO Bell Building
nso-mi.org

Richard Hosey History is as much a part of large, iconic buildings as the homes we live in. Restoring a historic home can be expensive and time consuming, but it does not have to be. In the next video, Lansing Eastside restorationist Dave Muylle shows how to preserve a home and keep it affordable.

---Dave Muylle---

Dave Muylle We're at 134 Regent Street. It's on the Eastside of Lansing. It's just south of Michigan Avenue. Classic east side neighborhood: small houses, blue collar neighborhood.

When we walked in five years ago, it was a typical old house with plaster ceilings that were about seven feet tall and really poor condition and the floor was covered with various levels or layers of different types of flooring. So true historic preservation is you save the plaster, you save every piece of the original building and there's a place for that, but not in these neighborhoods I don't think. It's more about preserving what's useable and then making it more serviceable, give more utility to people who really want to live in these neighborhoods. Because at the end of the day, it's about who wants to live in the neighborhood, who wants to live in the building, and make it so they can take care of it and maintain it.

There wasn't anything really left in here from the original house. There's a few pieces of trim, which of course we took down and will restore and put back in place. Most of the framing is new, but the shell is the original shell.

This would've had wood windows. Sadly they were taken out long ago and these were put in. I've done plenty of projects where we've restored the wood sash. I mean, that's my preference, but I'm not going to take these out, spend \$700 and opening to put a wood window in, or else, you know, again, budget would be busted and nobody would be able to afford it.

This particular house is going to be part of a larger scheme which is called Cottage Lane and what I want to do is build out. We're going to put seven cottages within this site and this will be the community room for that project.

This is a little piece of a large puzzle which is probably way beyond the scope of what we're doing here today, but those two houses are the ones that I've restored and those are part of the project as well. See, now that's historic preservation. All the original detail on the trim. Where I substituted, I used like materials.

I love historic preservation because it gives this fine detail. When you look close at a house like that, you see the fine detail. For me, that feeds my soul, but it's very expensive and time consuming and doesn't happen often. But in these neighborhoods, it's more important to keep preservation in mind, to keep our history in mind, but to not be... that shouldn't be the overriding thing. It should be making it so it's loveable enough for somebody to move here, to live here, and to take care of whatever it is that's here.

There used to be three of these beautiful craftsman style duplexes over here. There were three of them in a row. So that's this one, and these are two that got torn down. That's what they could have been.

The reason for keeping as much of the old houses as possible is there's a term called embedded energy. And what that means is, when this house was built, energy was used to take the trees down. Energy was... well, the trees needed energy to grow. Then, humans came along with their machinery and used fossil fuels to cut them down and rip the boards and create the building. So there's that energy is still in all those pieces of material. So it's about keeping the energy, the embedded energy, in the building.

But it's also more cosmic, and that is we can understand that those people were just as smart, just as important and just as thoughtful as we are. And the people that come ten years or twenty years or a hundred years from now are the same. We're just... we're not as big a deal as we think we are. We all think this is the most important age of ever. But we're all just on a line here, and so I think it's our responsibility first of all to keep that in mind, and secondly to try to quit throwing stuff away. I mean, this is the ultimate in recycling.

And so that, you know, there's a value there. There's a value to old houses that can't be put in a check.

Dave Muylle
Restoring Lansing's Eastside

Richard Hosey As we've seen in today's episode, historic preservation is about saving the structures that define the character of where we live. It's about using what we already have to make our communities better.

Thank you for joining me, Richard Hosey, on The Bright Side. If you would like to find out more about anything on today's show or watch this episode again, visit brightsidetv.com.

---Outtakes---

Richard Hosey I'll try not to get to 45 or 46 takes you know.

Olivia Courant That would be a record!

Dave Muylle This is 1930 or something like that. You read about people's lives, you know, you read about some young adorable girl who's getting married.

Richard Hosey Lansing Eastside restorationist Dave Muylle shows us how... oh, so close.

Olivia Courant Sooo close!

Richard ...how to preserve!

Richard Hosey Want me to try it again?

Olivia Courant Okay. Take two... five...

Richard Right, exactly.

Interviewer Did you go to the spring fling?

Cortez Parrott Spring fling, of course.

Olivia Courant What's that?

Cortez Oh, whoo! Spring fling is good, excellent, very nice! You can dance, you can eat, sing, all that. It was just... I actually had a nice time.

---Credits---

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Josh Woodward – “Heritage Place,” “Morning Blue” (joshwoodward.com)

Dan-O Songs – “Casino Clocks” (danosongs.com)

Ronny Matthes – “Perlender Champagner”

Keffy Kay – “To The Light,” “4 Moments Reprise”

hjcrbass – “Bossa Nova Loop”

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Kerr Building

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