

Reuse/redevelopment project of the year

Whole Foods Market

Oakland

BY JUDY JACOBS
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After more than 20 years of neglect, a building that tells the history of transportation in America has been redeveloped into Oakland's first Whole Foods Market. It was built in 1890 as the car house and powerhouse for the Consolidated Piedmont Cable Co., and subsequently was owned by several other railway companies. In 1925, the building, which sits on Bay Place, a block from Lake Merritt, was sold and redesigned as a showroom for a series of Cadillac dealerships - Don Lee, Shepherd, Pat Patterson and finally Cox.

Not much of the original structure remains. "We kept the original trusses from the 1890s, the facades of Harrison Street and Bay Place and the roofline of the historic building. Everything else is new," said Ken Lowney of Lowney Architecture, the project's architect.

The real challenge, according to Lowney, was the fact that it's an old site with a lot of the utilities and infrastructure still in place.

"At one point, we found the tip of a giant pyramid and thought it was the tip of an alien spaceship, but it was just the tip of the smoke stack. Underneath the pyramid was a forest of wooden piles.

"There's even an underground stream that runs through the



Photo courtesy of Lowney Architecture

site. We knew it was a complicated site before we started, but it was more complicated than we imagined," he said.

For Scott Anderson, project executive at Charles Pankow Builders Ltd., the challenges included the topography of the site and the close proximity of

neighborhoods.

"Within one city block you have Westlake Middle School, senior housing at St. Paul's and a church," he said.

The neighboring community has been involved in seeing this building saved for more than two decades and is enthusias-

tic about Whole Foods moving in. Traffic remains a concern, however.

"It was derelict for so many years, so the neighborhood is really happy. We're delighted to see the building come back to life. The real wish for the neighbors is that it will be pedestrian-

oriented rather than car-oriented," said Naomi Schiff, a board member of Oakland Heritage Alliance and nearby neighbor. And with more housing such as that being developed in the burgeoning Uptown district just blocks away, their wish may come to pass.