

# DIAMOND

*in the rough*



JUST A HALF BLOCK FROM WHERE ANTI-LIQUOR ADVOCATE REVEREND GEORGE HADDOCK WAS GUNNED DOWN IN 1866 SITS THE NEW HOME OF INNOVATIVE BENEFITS CONSULTANTS (IBC). THIS CIRCA-1900 STRUCTURE—ONE OF MANY DECAYED BUILDINGS IN SIOUX CITY'S HISTORICAL PEARL STREET DISTRICT—MOST RECENTLY HOUSED SOLENOID VALVES AND OTHER ELECTRICAL COMPONENTS FOR DISTRIBUTOR LAKELAND ENGINEERING.

WORDS: DAVID WHITMYER IMAGES: JUSTIN MEYER



**ARCHITECT:** PLAN ARCHITECTURE  
**CONTRACTOR:** BROWN WEGHER CONSTRUCTION  
 SEE P. 48 FOR FULL PROJECT CREDITS

Expanding its practice, IBC selected PLaN Architecture, a young, local, seven-person firm to renovate the Lakeland building. Nathan Kalaher, AIA, architect and partner at PLaN, describes the existing conditions as mid-1970s, with imitation wood paneling, yellowed ceiling tiles and tattered sheet carpet.

“There’s a seediness to the neighborhood,” says Kalaher. It’s littered with vacant one- and two-story brown and reddish brick buildings, but for the last few years, developers have been restoring properties and opening new businesses, including PLaN’s studio, and the area is starting to boom.

PLaN’s designers saw past the building’s dated aspects and developed a minimal, honest design based on the primary structure of the perimeter load-bearing masonry walls, interior timber columns and concrete floors. “We utilized a reductive design strategy as opposed to an additive strategy,” says Kalaher. “Demolition was used as a design tool to reveal historical construction methods and details.”

With the bare bones showing, the architects laid out the walls programmatically to work with the structure, using the column grid as the organization system. They sandblasted vertical timbers to reveal their original patina, cleaned the brick walls



**Before and After** (above), PLaN removed old shades and worn glass block windows to open up the simple façade.

**Bare Bones** (left). Open joists and bridging with the polished concrete floor show the building’s original skeleton.

and opened the ceilings to show their joists and bridging. All of the original materials and structural elements factored into the renovated design. “We chose not to hide anything,” says Kalaher.

PLaN used the textures and colors of the raw building to conceive simple, elegant tongue-and-groove walls of clear cedar, many with an artistic slat pattern near the upper edge. Knotty wood near the lobby/atrium adds visual energy to the space. The existing concrete floors were simply grinded and polished. “We incorporated colors through the materials,” says Kalaher. For example, the building’s interior walls are white, so using woods adds warmer colors.

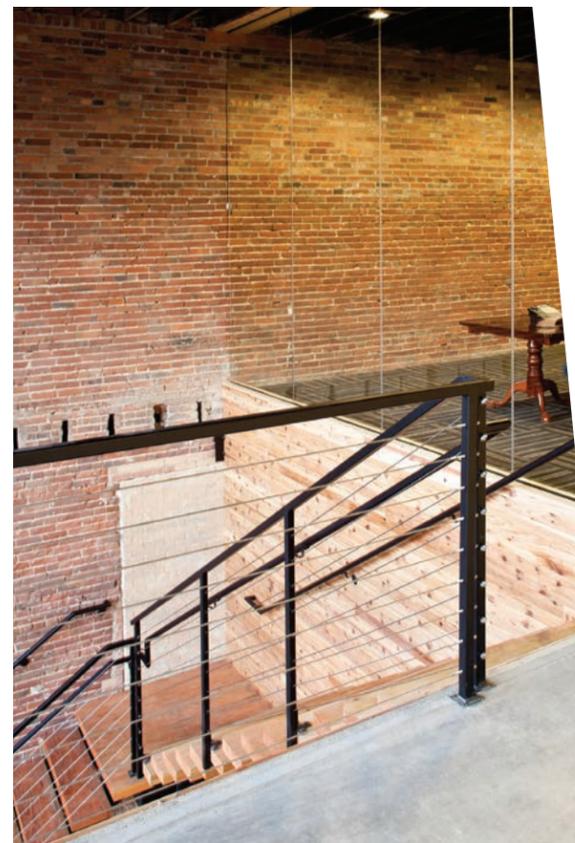
Floor-to-ceiling glass, at the front of each office, provides a bit of acoustic separation from the open workspace while maintaining a view of the building’s skeleton—a dialogue between the old and the new. “One of our biggest challenges was dealing with highly machined elements, such as railings and glass, in a space where walls weren’t square and columns were slightly off grid,” says Kalaher. This is also where the subtle but intricately considered details shine, such as the aluminum channel of the glass that is slightly trenched into the concrete floor, making it almost disappear.

PLaN recognized that the building already had a craft about it, with its period materials and details, and then highlighted it with modern, functional infill. “We respected what the building was and had to offer, and we worked to find a way to appropriately mesh contemporary interventions with the historical framework.” The result is a skillfully assembled jewel. **la**



**Balanced Surfaces.** A visually energetic latticed wall is balanced against the polished concrete floor and modern glass.

**Transparent Skin.** Floor-to-ceiling non-reflective glass shows off the building’s 100 year-old brick wall.



**Convergence.** The office space provides a juxtaposition of both new and original materials and colors.

|| Demolition was used as a design tool to reveal historical construction methods and details. We chose not to hide anything. —Nathan Kalaher, AIA ||