

# Jefferson Square

Pertinent Renovation in the Hub of Toronto's King West Community

*By Pamela Snow*

*Photographs by Robert Burley*

**T**he land that lies between Strachan and Dufferin, stretching south from King Street to the broad railway tracks and beyond is not exactly picturesque. Industrial since the turn of the century, this area known as the King West Community, is the most recent of Toronto's antiquated, run-down business sectors to receive a dose of rejuvenation. Architecturally innovative new

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structures and renovations that bastardize but do not alter the unique flavour of the neighbourhood are gradually taking the place of crumbling warehouses with shattered glass and graffiti as their trademarks.

The very building that houses this publication's offices is one such venerable monument. Ivy-covered, aged brick walls, high-arched windows, uneven wooden floors and cumbersome interior freight elevators are the hallmarks of this structure, but remain consistent with most similar places in the local vicinity. Yet somehow the character of such places — even to the menacing, narrow towers that loom over rooftops — has been the focus of preservation by developers.

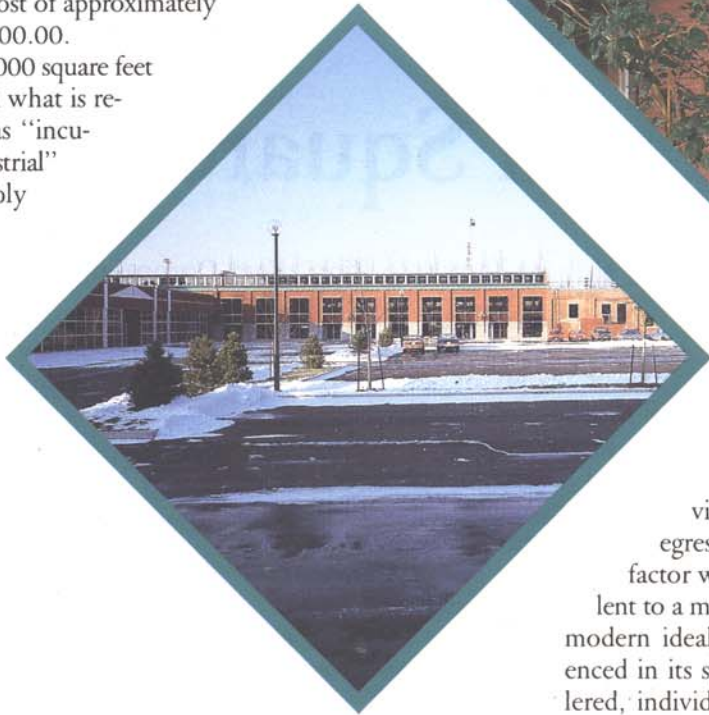
Prior to its renovation by the McKenn Development Corporation, a low-key firm with 11 current projects, the decrepit, abandoned warehouse showed the same zero potential as most of its immediate neighbours. Currently known as Jefferson Square, the intriguing multi-purpose project was acquired in December, 1987 and within three weeks the design was essentially complete. The demolition permit was issued while the working drawings were under way. Housing businesses primarily involved in the creative arts — film and video, communications, publishing, design — Jefferson Square opened its renovated doors with pride and ceremony at the end of last October.

A Phoenix of a project, due to its location (frontage is on three — Liberty, Jefferson and Pardee streets) I was able to watch the transformation, step-by-step as it occurred. From the rubble rose the architecturally coordinated future, at a total cost of approximately \$14,500,000.00.

The 80,000 square feet of space in what is referred to as "incubator industrial" are enviably close to the

city's downtown core, and provide tenants with the ability to preserve their separate identities with ground floor entrances to suites. Crucial in the congested area, Jefferson Square also boasts a full complement of parking spaces. Two mandates were exercised by the developers and urban-dynamite architect Julian Jacobs: to create a public square, in historic European manner, by the strategic placement of the three buildings to form a natural courtyard; and to retain a classic design that would address current aesthetics and sensibilities, but withstand the all-telling test of time.

A unique element that adds personality and ingenuity is



the individual ingress/egress for tenants, a factor which Jacobs insists is integral to a marketing concept. The modern ideal of this project is evidenced in its systems: completely sprinklered, individual electrical meters and hot

water tanks, individual washrooms, fully air conditioned again with separate controls, and floor coverings in place.

This studio/office development is especially appealing to arts-oriented firms in that its design maximizes the ratio of natural light, both from floor-to-ceiling windows and banks of skylights. With the lion's share of area



occupants involved in similar or complementary fields, the ease of carrying on business is a foregone conclusion.

The structure that has graduated to become Jefferson Square was originally erected in 1901 from red brick and cornerstone, and actually comprises three buildings. Care has been taken to preserve the singular beauty of the

masonry, and period arches that face Liberty Street have also been incorporated into the renovated design parameters. A courtyard amid the trio of one-and two-storey structures helps to create the community sense that the developers desired.

In keeping with the style-conscious nature of the tenants, units offer exposed wood, steel ceilings and trusses, and exposed brick. Flexible space arrangements start from 1,100 square feet, but all units have ground floor entry, and some have two floors capped with clerestory windows. Julian Jacobs (winner of the 1988 Mississauga Urban Design Award, and the 1987 North York Award of Excellence) has mastered the art of bringing in the new while preserving the special details of the old, a technique which he refers to as "architectural interventions".

The buildings are conveniently labelled A, B, and C to distinguish them. The largest, a two-storey structure, had no facade on the courtyard side when development began, and was little more than a random collection of existing sheds. The aim of the developers was to duplicate the renovated design on the street side, and match it on the courtyard side. Entries had to be created in the extensive, unexpressive facade, and were purposely set back to conjure a relief effect and deviate from the monotony.

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Enamelled steel canopies were erected over entry ways providing more dimension as well as practical protection from the elements. The double-level windows were brought down to ground level, and in conjunction, the solid element that originally comprised the tops of the window frames was lowered in the interests of solidity and proportion (a two tone ratio).

**B**ut years of neglect and heavy use had taken its toll on the buildings. Following the removal of the courtyard side walls, massive bracing was required to ensure structural stability. This also applied to future considerations, making sure that the foundation walls would support the proposed modifications. Twisted and damaged columns, especially on the lower level, had to be repaired and plated. Floors, altered by nearly a century of transportation impact, had to be levelled. Practicality versus aesthetics were wrestled with in terms of insulation, as much of it was required to be placed around the bold clerestory windows. Replacement of the rotting metal flashing resulted in a blue/green (maintaining the original tone) cornice that tied in with the shade selected to complement the entire project. It took seven masons a total of only eight weeks to clean and repoint the brickwork. Porcelaine tile and traditional/contemporary blendlight fixtures capped the efforts, affording the newly renovated structure its inherently human scale. Interlocking brick in two shades adds a village dimension to the project, which is evidence of the architect's desire to accentuate the positive.

A substantial allotment of space exists in block A to house a future restaurant facility.

Interiors are singularly attractive, preserving one-of-a-kind original materials, such as brick and structural steel, and parlaying them into decor enhancements. The use of non-orthogonal grids and forms has resulted in maximum (and creative) use of interior space plans, incorporating for instance, rotundas.

In order to permit corner unit entry and parking lot access from the courtyard side of building A, building B required separation for this purpose. Skylit, the separation is weather protected.

**I**n arriving at the new architectural expression for building B, block crosswalls were required to replace rigidity lost with masonry removal. Julian Jacobs who shared his passion for Jefferson Square, stated, "We did not want to mimic or repeat. While in keeping with block A, the intention was to produce an original expression in its own right, but it had to work with the project in its entirety. It is in effect a family of buildings, with continuity and similarity, but there are no twins."

This desire has been realized.

The fenestration is indeed the same, and the colours match (bronze glazing, blue/green metalwork), but the forms vary slightly. A perfect example is the placement of elongated triangular pediments over recessed porticoes, resulting in interesting bas relief. Jacobs has achieved his intention to blend a series of ideas with "richness in forms".

The third structure, C, has had the least renovation performed on it. While it is tenanted, its future may alter radically with Phase II of the Jefferson Square project. The existing lot allows for 700,000 square feet of development, with only 80,000 currently accounted for. The notion of McKenn Development Corporation is to redevelop the area that currently consists of block C into a multi-storey building, housing other facilities and amenities — health centre, reproduction companies, and related support services.

Both developer and architect for Jefferson Square have struck a balance on the fine line that divides urban renewal from heritage preservation, and they have done it with panache. Targeting a discriminating — both from the artistic and economical standpoint — market like graphic designers equals challenge, but

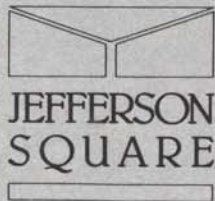
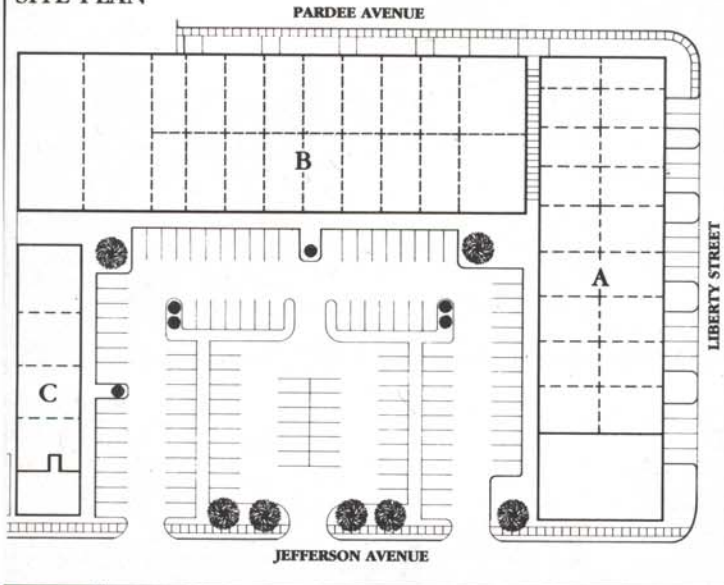
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aspects of this project have gone beyond simply complying with standard. They have risen above mandatory requirement and brought to the King West Community what the test of time will prove to be a classic. □

#### SITE PLAN



**Developers:** McKenn Development Corporation  
Philip Heller, president  
Tom Deutsch, vice-president,  
construction.

**Architect:** Julian Jacobs Architects Ltd.

**Structural Engineer:** Zaretsky Consulting  
Engineers Inc.

**Electrical and Mechanical:** Boyle Laken  
Engineering

**Masonry:** Fantin Masonry

**Windows:** M&I Aluminum

**HVAC:** Bornemann Mechanical

**Plumbing:** Danny's Mechanical

**Structural Steel:** JKS Fabricating

**Roof:** Pollard Roofing

**Stucco:** Flamboro Specialty Coatings

**Financing:** Counsel Trust Co.