

Hot Issue



Urban revitalization projects bring safer feelings, bigger crowds

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Architect Robert Parnes speaks in vivid, intricate detail about his 13-year restoration of the Paramount Theater in New York City's famed Times Square, an area once plagued by dilapidation and crime. Parnes boasts of the rebirth that's found visitors marveling at the history that's wrapped in the refurbished crevices of the area's old theaters and office buildings.

It's all part of a move to make **urban** areas trendy once again, and it's being done with a focus on refurbishing old buildings — and building new ones — with features that make people feel safe.

It's happening everywhere, say busy architects and designers. In London, for example, the **revitalization** of Canary Wharf — an area once plagued by deterioration — has reaped positive changes for the entire city, and has managed to attract the blue-chip tenants so uninterested just a few years ago.

Preserving buildings, preserving cities, preserving history

It hasn't all just happened by accident, though. In many cases, including that of Canary Wharf, government tax incentives have helped lure developers to eroding **urban** areas. In the United States, tax incentives focused on historic buildings, historic areas and designated enterprise zones have contributed to the rebirth sweeping major American cities.

"The tax benefits make it make sense," says Ed Hord, principal of the Baltimore-based architectural firm Hord Coplan Macht and past vice president of the American Institute of Architects. "That's an amazing stimulus for working on historic buildings that end up being inner cities. It preserves our historical fabric, as well as being a development tool for our inner cities. Plus it makes deals work."

Indeed, those incentives have produced their intended reward: the replacement of crime-riddled, dying **urban** areas with refurbished older buildings and grand new ones that prompt more of each. It's gotten downright contagious.

"This is the reverse of the cancer of run-down buildings. This is healthy buildings that are spreading more health," says Parnes, a principal with Tobin-Parnes Design Enterprises in New York City.

As potential residents see the health, they want to join in, to feel a part of the exciting action.

"People that have school-age children don't stay because the schools aren't great," says Hord. "But we're starting to see empty-nesters move back when their kids are gone."

And living and shopping in older **urban** buildings seems to be providing something of a "comfort food" for these trend-setters.

"As you grow up, there are certain things you remember that gave you comfort," Parnes says. "It's the same thing with architecture. There's a certain comfort level with 'it's still there after all these years,' and you can still use it after all these years."