

267 Rutledge

2018 Carolopolis Award – Architect’s Narrative

According to city records, 267 Rutledge was built in 1901 as John Meyer & Co. Grocery. It had residential quarters upstairs for the owners. It was a grand and fine quality structure. The large retail gallery had a high plastered cove ceiling and ornate built-in shelving and cornice, which partially survive. In the front were high windows facing the Rutledge Avenue trolley line, with a glazed window-display box visible from both interior and exterior. The upstairs residence occupied the whole second floor, also with large rooms and high ceilings. It was accessed by the porch stair behind a piazza screen. At some later date, likely in the 1920s, an additional 1-story office was added to the south side of the structure, with a formal facade with parapet, making for an interesting series of alternating commercial and residential entrances along the Rutledge facade.

In more recent times, the downstairs was used as a private club, with bar and pool table, and its beauty was obscured by a drop ceiling and the destruction of the glazed storefront and replacement by a brick and plywood facade. Although otherwise fairly intact in appearance, the whole structure was severely damaged by termite and rot.

The current owner, upon purchasing the building, wished to restore the original exterior appearance of the structure, and create two apartments upstairs. The exterior restoration required careful investigation of the remaining woodwork around the missing storefront, from which we were able to extrapolate an informed guess of the original design. The remaining woodwork and cast-iron elements were carefully restored, and the missing parts replaced and seamlessly integrated. The rest of the exterior was similarly restored, with many replacement window sashes needed, and new side doors, all custom made to fit the existing casing.

The piazza was in particularly poor condition, and needed to be completely dismantled and reframed. The original posts were re-used, with new decking, balustrade, and stair to match the original. The damage was caused by a serious problem with the building, which was that rain flowed down the piazza stair and became trapped in the interior space of the building, unable to flow out of the piazza because of the 1920s addition that closed in its south side.

That addition was found to be completely structurally unsound, and had already been reframed more than once in its history. Water was trapped both under its floor and on its flat roof, which was flashed against the neighbor's house with nowhere to drain. We dismantled the addition, installed a new concrete slab foundation under it and the piazza, and then reframed the addition with a jog to keep it clear of the neighbor's house. It now has a properly sloping roof and a drainage system to remove the rainwater that flows down the piazza stair. We salvaged and restored the front doors and canopy brackets, and rebuilt the facade of the addition with those elements.

The interior conversion to two apartments was an interesting challenge. The structure has a sizable third floor, which was always finished space, fully wood paneled, but it had only a tiny utility stair to access it, and appeared never to have been used as living space. It was very likely originally built as room to expand the house in the future. We built a generous new staircase in the central foyer of the house, a switchback stair in the typical Charleston manner, and added four dormer windows to the roof - their design modeled on those seen on many similar buildings in the neighborhood. We feel that this expansion of the useable part of the house was done in much the way the original builder would have done it, had the owner needed more space earlier in the building's history.

