

Clem Labine's TRADITIONAL BUILDING

The Professional's Resource For Public Architecture

Free Product Literature Online
www.traditional-building.com

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2002 ■ www.traditional-building.com ■ VOLUME 15/NUMBER 5 ■ \$6.00

ANNUAL PARKS & LANDSCAPES EDITION

FEATURING:

Water Features & Fountains
Public Sculpture & Statuary
Green Building Products
Columns & Capitals
Planters & Urns
Gates & Fences
Wood Turnings
Retaining Walls
Balustrades
Bridges

ALSO FEATURING:

Epoxies for Restoration
Landscape Paving Materials
Polymer Millwork & Moldings
Pavilions, Gazebos & Shelters
Landscape & Exterior Lighting
Landscape & Garden Ornament
Benches & Outdoor Furnishings
Landscape Products & Specialties
Lanterns, Street & Pathway Lighting
Masonry Cleaning, Stripping & Restoration

Traditional Building
604 Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217
Change service requested.

Presorted Bound
Printed Matter
U.S. Postage
PAID
Eaton, PA
Permit No. 51

PRESERVATION TO A TEE

On Ferris Street between Sullivan & Wolcott in Brooklyn's Red Hook marina, Rhett Butler is meticulously restoring five 19th-century warehouses that collectively add up to 95,000 sq.ft. — 45% of a standard city block — for the manufacture, production, and warehousing of his decorative hardware.

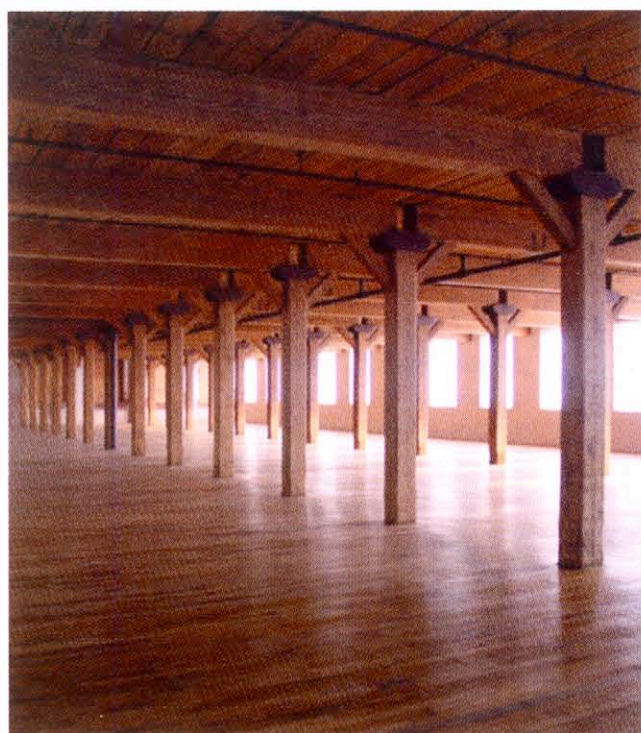
E.R. (Rhett) Butler owns the eponymously named specialty hardware boutique, once located only on Spring Street in Manhattan's SoHo, but now with showrooms in Boston and Charleston. He became aware of a vast complex of industrial buildings in Brooklyn's Red Hook district, and decided to purchase it for its proximity to the company's main office in SoHo, its vast size, and the opportunity to preserve and rehabilitate the historic site.

Some History

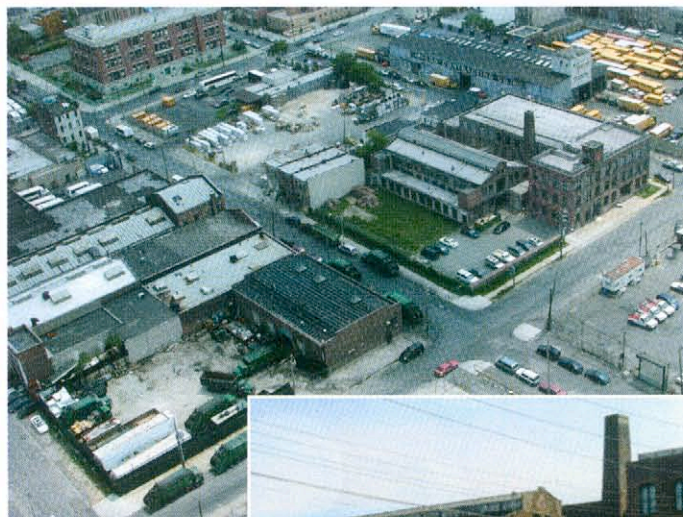
The complex was built from 1887 to 1893 and designed by William B. Tubby — responsible also for five of New York City's Carnegie libraries and Brooklyn's Pratt Institute. The five buildings, connected internally, include a three-story mill-construction industrial building, a three-story brick-vault construction administrative building, a one-story brick-vault construction boiler plant, a two-story brick-and-steel-construction foundry building, and a two-story brick-vault construction industrial building.

The buildings' tenants have been many in the last hundred years: Wittemann Brothers' bottling supply and machinery (1917); Le Comte & Co.'s tin-can, galvanized-iron-, and drums-manufacturing plant (1917, lessee to Wittemann); Segal Lock & Hardware Co. (1927); New York Ordnance District for munitions manufacturing during World War II (1939); and the Norwalk Lock Co. (1944). In August 1998, Rhett Butler became their owner.

With the acquisition of the Red Hook buildings, Butler is now able to consolidate all aspects of his business — machining, casting, fabrication, production, and warehousing operations — as well as add a woodworking and custom furniture shop.



Restoration of the vast interior spaces included carting out massive amounts of construction debris; replacing windows; re-anchoring massive columns, beams, and braces; replacing Southern yellow pine flooring.



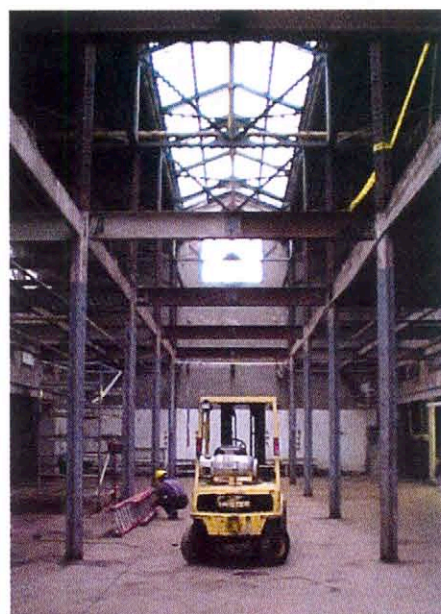
The five-building complex is located on the waterfront in Brooklyn's Red Hook district.



The Restoration

Despite all of the bad repairs that had taken place over the course of a century — badly skim-coated brick, bricked-up windows, etc. — as well as predictable deterioration (structural weakening, for example), Butler's mission has essentially been realized: The shells of the building have been taken back to their 1893 condition.

To say that this project was massive is an understatement. In the first two years, demolition debris filled 400 dumpsters and Butler employed two masons, full-time, for almost three years to replace, repoint, and clean the brick facades. Blind windows were replaced; bricked-up doorways were opened; maple flooring (designed to be fireproof and pitched 1 in. every 10 ft. to shed water) was completely replaced with salvaged flooring provided by Restoration Hardwoods; Southern yellow pine beams (measuring an astonishing 18 in. x 15 in. x 20 ft.) were sistered, where deteriorated, or replaced. The buildings also feature one of the earliest examples of star columns.



Other major improvements included roof repair; installation of a high-pressure gas line; removal of the existing boiler and installation of a new HVAC system; replacement of electrical, plumbing, and steam-pipe systems; and beautification of the property (i.e., repair and replacement of exterior brickwork, restoration of the fire box, replacement of telephone poles and equipment, tree planting, and installation of exterior lighting).

The renovation program also included replacing all the windows with either double-hung or center-pivot wood sash. All skylights were replaced, complete with copper frames. Floors were burnished with steel wool and hand-rubbed with tung-oil.

At the end of five years, Butler will install state-of-the-art manufacturing machinery (he already has eight robotics on site for metal and wood) and warehousing systems for the production of hardware based on both historic patterns and contemporary styles. He also plans to promote skills in metalworking, woodworking, casting, porcelain and glass work, as well as house a research and design library (he currently owns a library containing over 5,000 antique trade catalogs).

Outside the buildings, Butler's landscaping program includes a 5,000-sq.ft. parking area and an 8,000-sq.ft. garden. ■ —Judith Siegel Lief