

# ARCHITECTURE **DC**

## Urban Anchor

### Two Adjacent Projects Create A New Center of Gravity in Shaw

by Ronald O'Rourke

**Project:** Wonder Bread Factory Renovation, Washington, DC

Architects: **R2L:Architects**

Structural Engineers: **MGV Consulting Structural Engineers, Inc.**

MEP Engineers: **Schwartz, Sievers, Anoa Engineering, LLC**

Civil Engineers: **Dewberry**

General Contractor: **McCullough Construction, LLC**

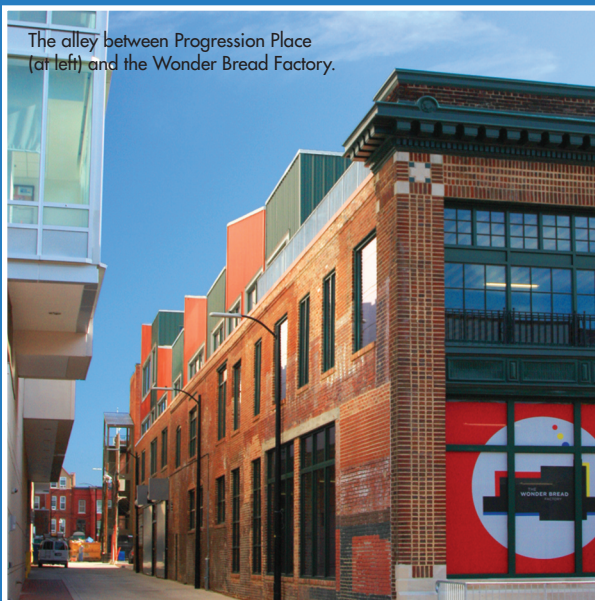
#### Wonder Bread Factory

The Wonder Bread Factory project, designed by **R2L: Architects**, preserves the brick outer walls of the old Wonder Bread factory building at 641 S Street, NW, while completely rebuilding the interior to create a project with 98,000 square feet of retail and office space on four levels plus a basement.

The building, whose oldest section dated to about 1913, was originally built for Dorsch's White Cross Bakery, which is why the façade incorporates white crosses. The facility was bought in 1936 by Wonder Bread, which continued to operate it as a bakery for Wonder Bread and Hostess Cake products until the late 1980s. The property remained vacant for the next two decades, during which time the interior of the building decayed.



Photo by Bradley W. Johnson, AIA | DC



The alley between Progression Place (at left) and the Wonder Bread Factory.

Courtesy of R2L:Architects



The Wonder Bread Factory, with new additions visible in the background.


Courtesy of R2L:Architects

The design for the renovation increased the building's height to four floors. The fourth floor is set well back from the building's front on T Street, NW, preserving the appearance of the historic façade when viewed from the street. On the building's long (Wiltberger Street) side, the newly added levels employ setbacks to break up the building's mass and coordinate with reference lines established by the historic side wall.

Recalling the building's industrial past, the added volume is sheathed in corrugated metal panels reminiscent of shipping containers. The panels are painted in orange and green tones that complement the darker brick of the building's historic outer walls, and are punctuated by large aluminum-framed windows. The newly built interiors offer loft-like spaces with open plans. The ground floor and basement level are being offered for retail use; the top three levels are intended as Class A office space.

## A Shift in Materials

In combination with the Howard Theatre, Progression Place and the Wonder Bread Factory create a block with a mix of residential, cultural, retail, and office spaces intended to further strengthen Shaw as a live-work-play neighborhood. At the same time, in combination with nearby projects such as the Watha T. Daniel-Shaw

Public Library and numerous modern residential buildings by Suzane Reatig Architecture (see, for example, the Summer 2013 issue of *ARCHITECTURE***DC**), Progression Place and the Wonder Bread Factory are helping to shift the Shaw neighborhood from an area dominated by brick buildings to one that is more of a mix of masonry, metal paneling, and glass. The emerging result is a more varied built environment that displays layers of history rather than a single historical moment. 

Rear addition to the Wonder Bread Factory.

Photo by Bradley W. Johnson, AIA|DC

