

## Saving Breuer's Pirelli Building

Bruce Redman Becker ('84), principal of integrated architecture and development firm Becker + Becker, in Westport, Connecticut, has purchased the Armstrong Rubber Company Building, in New Haven, designed by Marcel Breuer. After the building was acquired and subsequently vacated by Pirelli, IKEA purchased it in 2003 but never occupied it. Known for its sculptural precast concrete facade and cantilevered structure designed by Robert Gatje with Breuer, it has functioned mostly as an advertising billboard for the past decade, except for an occasional art project (see *Constructs* Fall 2017). Becker was fascinated with the building as a graduate student at Yale and began studying its adaptive reuse and preservation potential after completing 360 State Street, an apartment building within Elm City Market in New Haven. Becker will design and develop the project and partner with a hotel operator in response to increasing demand for hotel rooms in the city.

Becker's interest in the historic preservation of Modernist buildings and sustainability led him to the 1968 building and the Secretary of the Interior Standards. The structure is listed on the State Historic Preservation Register and is eligible for the National Register, allowing restoration work to be funded partially with Historic Preservation Tax Credits. Becker has previous experience with historic preservation projects in the region: he restored and redeveloped the Octagon on Roosevelt Island and the Bank of America tower in Hartford, designed by Welton Becket, which

uses the same MoSai precast concrete panel system found in the Pirelli.

Breuer had convinced the Armstrong Rubber Company to build the structure as a multistoried office and gateway to the city. Becker said, "The building is a sculptural masterpiece." After IKEA purchased it, the horizontal factory section was demolished to make way for a parking lot, and preservation organizations such as Docomomo New York/Tri-State and New Haven Preservation Trust objected. Yet it is a miracle that the building still stands. In exchange for a low purchase price, Becker and his team are required to follow guidelines set by IKEA, such as purchasing a certain amount of IKEA furniture and carrying out asbestos remediation.

The latter aligns perfectly with Becker's goal to produce the first Passive House certified hotel in the United States. It will have all-electric mechanical systems that will operate without fossil fuels and be powered and heated by renewable energy from rooftop photovoltaic panels and solar canopies in the parking area. The building structure is well suited for adaptable reuse as a hotel, with 85-foot-wide floor plates that can accommodate guest rooms using the original office-building circulation. The original 16-foot-high penthouse mechanical space above the eighth floor will be redeveloped as a meeting and conference space with recessed mechanical courts replaced by internal windowed courtyards.

Local newspapers and architecture publications have featured stories about the project's potential to promote the growth of New Haven in a positive direction as well as continued interest in the preservation of significant modern architecture.

