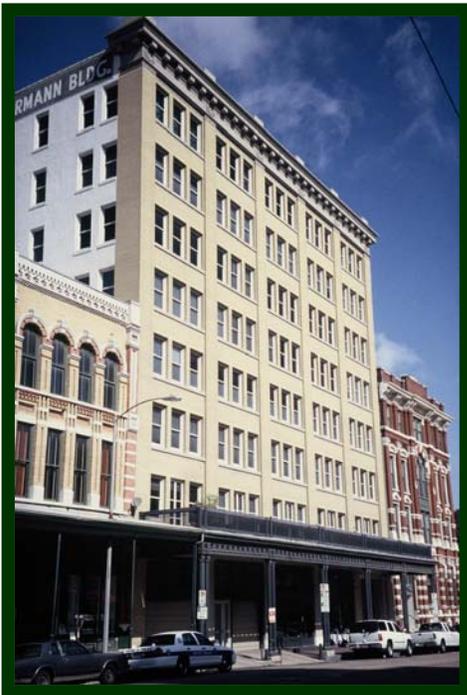


Living Downtown in Historic Buildings

Urban sociologists are strong advocates for the idea that high-density residential/retail/cultural districts are essential elements for a dynamic city in the 21st century. Since Houston has always aspired to be a dynamic city, it is taking this advice seriously and developing high-density centers. Downtown Houston is becoming a popular one by recycling historic buildings as comfortable places to live. In preserving these buildings, environmental concerns are also being addressed by preventing tons of building materials from being deposited into landfills.

In 1993 the concept of residential lofts was introduced by the adaptive use of two buildings. There were two apartment units created in the 1889 **W. L. Foley Co. Building (214 Travis Street)** while the ground floor of the former dry goods store continued to be used for commercial ventures. **Dakota Lofts (711 William Street)** was carved out of the



Hermann Lofts

1910 Bute Paint Co. Building, located in an area of older warehouses north of Buffalo Bayou. The Warehouse District became an artists' haven as smaller buildings also provided housing units, such as the **San Jacinto Lofts (915 N. San Jacinto Street)** that were built into a 1914 warehouse. In 1995 the 1921 Hogg Building was redeveloped into **Hogg Palace (401 Louisiana Street)**. With 80 units topped by a penthouse and rooftop garden, it was the largest adaptive re-use accomplished during these early years.

In 1997 a long-awaited conversion occurred when the 1913 Rice Hotel—a legendary Houston establishment—was transformed into the **Post Rice Lofts (909 Texas Avenue)**, containing 312 rental units. That same year, the seven-story Hermann Estate Building, erected in 1917, became **Hermann Lofts (214 Travis Street)** and provided 25 loft apartments for sale to future downtown residents.



Another project was developed in 1997 when a furniture factory in the shadows of downtown was turned into **White Oak Bayou Lofts (1011 Wood**

Bayou Lofts

Street). Two more projects evolved in 1998. The Keystone Building from the 1920s was transformed into the **Keystone Lofts (1120 Texas Avenue)** and the M. E. Foster Building became **Capitol Lofts (711 Main Street)**. A year later the Southern Pacific Building, a 1911 structure that was once headquarters for the largest work force in the city, was transformed into **Bayou Lofts (913 Franklin)**.

At the turn of the 21st century, it seemed that “downtown living” had captured the fancy of Houstonians ranging from single professionals to empty-nesters and even some families with young children as new projects in renovated historic buildings flourished. The Main Street corridor began to see more redevelopment between 2000 and 2005. The 1913 S. H. Kress & Co. Building was converted into **St. Germain Lofts (705 Main)**. Houston’s first steel-framed skyscraper, First National Bank (1905, 1909 and 1925), was rechristened **Franklin Lofts (201 Main)** and its elegant bank lobby became a special

events space, the Corinthian. At the corner of Main and Prairie, the 1934 Byrd's Department Store was renovated to become **Byrd's Lofts (919 Prairie)** with five loft apartments on the second and third floors while the ground floor is retail space, currently housing a



Byrd Building

much-welcomed food market for downtown residents. Farther down Main are found the **Kirby Lofts (917 Main)** with 70 units carved into the 1920 Kirby Building and across the street the 1928 Commerce Building, now named **Commerce Towers (914 Main)**, with 132 upscale units.

In 2005 the city's original Jefferson Davis Hospital, built in 1924, was converted into the **Elder Street Artists Lofts (1101 Elder Street)** with 31 studios/residences. The Tension Hotel, built in 1922 near the now-demolished Grand Central depot, was converted to the **Tension Lofts (110 Bagby)** in 2009. The most recent residential development adaptation, completed in 2010, is **City View Lofts (15 N. Chenevert Street)** in the 1910 National Biscuit Co. Building in the shadows of Minute Maid Park. Just a few blocks away at **515 Caroline**, a combination home and office has been created in the 1929 National Cash Register Building —a true return to the time when Houstonians lived and worked in a single space in the heart of the city.



Jeff Davis Hospital / Elder Street Lofts

Central Houston reports that there are currently 2,668 housing units in downtown Houston. It is obvious that a sizeable number of these are in architecturally significant and sturdily built historic structures. The adaptive use of these resources proves that historic preservation is a valuable tool in creating enclaves where people can live, work and play without spending hours commuting from place to place. If the increase in downtown living is any indication, many Houstonians are adopting the idea of adapting historic space into modern-day residences. After all, responsible recycling is also an important component of a dynamic city.