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REAL ESTATE MAY 2016



This artist's rendering shows Merriman Associates' redevelopment of the 52-story former First National Bank tower in downtown Dallas.
(Contributed - Merriman Associates Architects)



The Mosaic apartments are in two converted office towers in downtown Dallas.
(contributed - Merriman Associates Architects)



Merriman Associates was the architect for converting the Mercantile Continental building (at right) into downtown Dallas apartments.
(Contributed - Merriman Associates Architects)



(Contributed - Merriman Associates Architects)



This artist's rendering shows Merriman Associates' design for the century-old Dallas High School, which is being converted into office space.
(Contributed - Merriman Associates Architects)



(Contributed - Merriman Associates Architects)



The historic Lone Star Gas buildings were converted to apartments.
(David Woo - Staff Photographer)



Merriman Associates' first downtown Dallas renovation project was the Interurban Building on Jackson Street.
(Contributed - Merriman Associates Architects)

Standing in front of Dallas' landmark Statler Hotel, architect Jerry Merriman is quick to point out work under way high up on the exterior.

"All those colored panels have cleaned up very well," Merriman said about the 60-year-old Commerce Street building. "We've kept almost all of the original glass.

"It's really going to look great when it's done."

The 30-year-old architecture firm has done work on more than a dozen downtown historic building projects over the last decade, redesigning big chunks of downtown Dallas' skyline.

Its current projects include the two largest redevelopments ever downtown — the \$175 million redo of the Statler and the \$240 million renovation of the 52-story former First National Bank tower.

"We have lots of other projects that don't get as much attention," Merriman said. "Renovation work in one form or another is probably 30 percent of what we do."

Merriman Associates designed Bell Helicopter's worldwide office headquarters and training center in Fort Worth. It did diesel engine manufacturer Cummins' new industrial facility in Southwest Dallas. The firm is the architect for a new convention center hotel on the way in Amarillo and an office park in Austin.

But it's the landmark building reboots that get the Dallas-based firm the most attention.

"This wasn't an area we originally planned to focus on," Merriman said. "I don't think we knew any better."

Merriman Associates' first downtown historic project was restoration of the century-old Interurban Building on Jackson Street.

Built as the hub for a North Texas electric railway system, the nine-story building served as a bus station for years with offices on the upper floors. Merriman Associates did designs to convert it into 118 loft apartments and ground floor retail space in 2005.

"It gave us some credibility — it was a historic building, a National Park Service project," Merriman said. "Then we got a big boost when Hamilton Properties hired us to do the Mosaic apartments.

"We wouldn't be here today doing this if they hadn't given us the job."

Collaborative process

Hamilton Properties — with Merriman Associates as architect — converted two vacant insurance company towers on Akard Street into downtown's largest apartment community.

Merriman went on to do the four-building Lone Star Gas redevelopment for Hamilton Properties on the southeast side of downtown.

"They've gained a lot of experience in something that is quite different from ground-up construction," said developer Larry Hamilton. "It's a collaborative process with the developer and architect.

"They've been good to indulge us as we've worked with them on these projects."

Merriman Associates is also doing Hamilton's latest development, rebuilding a former Ramada Hotel on Akard Street near the convention center. It's being converted to a 237-room Lorenzo Ascend Hotel that will open in January.

Increasingly, the projects that Merriman Associates is working on were built in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

"1950s buildings are now historic," said Merriman Associates vice president Milton Anderson. "It is a little bit different than an early 1900s building."

Developer Forest City Enterprises hired Merriman Associates to convert the Mercantile Continental — which was completed in 1959 — into apartments.

"Converting an office building to a residential building or a hotel is challenging," said Jim Truitt, Forest City vice president. "Jerry and his team are very good at that."

"You always run into unknowns with these projects, no matter how much you do."

Across the street from the Mercantile Continental at 1712 and 1700 Commerce, Merriman Associates designed three new hotels to occupy the former office buildings. The project by hotel firm NewcrestImage is just finishing construction.

Expanding its reach

The former First National Bank building redevelopment — which stalled last year and is about to restart with new owners — will be one of the largest skyscraper conversions in the country.

New owner Drever Capital from California kept Merriman Associates on the project to tweak earlier plans. The most recent proposal includes 335 rental apartments, a 225-room luxury hotel and spa, shops and restaurants.

"The current program is to put the hotel in the lower portion of the tower and apartments above that," senior associate Aimee Sanborn said. "It's heavy mixed-use with retail on the ground floor."

With 55 people in the firm's Dallas office, Merriman Associates has expanded with operations in Austin and Charlotte, N.C.

The company has dramatically changed directions from its start in the mid-1980s, doing office and industrial building designs for developers including Trammell Crow Co.

“At one point we had a three-year contract with Trammell Crow,” Merriman said.

The architect expanded its renovations business to projects in Oklahoma, St. Louis and San Antonio.

New project work has also taken Merriman Associates to Singapore and Abu Dhabi.

“I don’t know where the growth will take us — it’s not like we’ve said we have got to be a 200-person firm,” Merriman said. “One opportunity tends to lead to another.”

Merriman’s downtown renovation projects **Completed**

Interurban Building: Residential/retail

The Mosaic: Two-building residential/retail

Mercantile Continental Building: Residential/retail

Gulf States Building: Residential/retail

Mayfair Department Store: Residential/retail

Lone Star Lofts: Four-building residential/retail/affordable housing

1600 Pacific (LTV Building): Residential/hotel

Under construction

Statler Hotel and Residences: Apartments, hotel, retail, office

1712-1700 Commerce: Three hotels

500 S. Ervay (Butler Bros. Building): Hotel/residential/retail

Dallas High School (Crozier Tech): Office/retail

Lorenzo Hotel: Hotel renovation

Mayflower Building: Residential

1400 Elm (First National Bank): Hotel/residential/retail and office

SOURCE: Merriman Associates