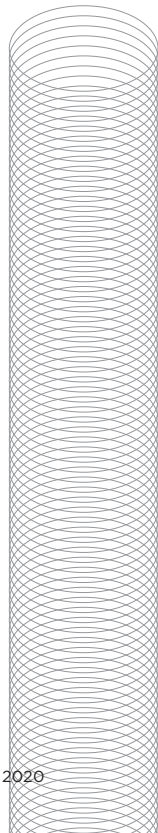


Industrial Evolution

An old Baltimore lithography factory becomes a source of hope for the surrounding community

by Joe Sugarman * photography by Jennifer Hughes







This page and previous page: Inside the office of Strong City Baltimore, a partner and tenant of the Center for Neighborhood Innovation in the old A. Hoen & Co. complex.



When Tom Hoen was a boy in the early 1970s, he would visit his father's factory on school field trips. At the time, A. Hoen & Co. was the oldest lithography firm in the country. Its massive printing presses produced everything from Topps baseball cards to the detailed maps folded into *National Geographic* magazine. Hoen would ride the bus with his classmates to the company's East Baltimore plant, and very often it was his father himself, Townsend Hoen, who would greet them. He'd usher the students into the company's buildings—which covered an entire city block—and show them around. "As soon as you'd walk in, you'd get a distinct smell of ink and paper, and see and hear these great big, loud machines going 'ka-chunk, ka-chunk, ka-chunk,'" Hoen, now 56, recalls. "What more could a 10-year-old boy want?"

But by 1981, the cacophony had stopped, silenced in part by the development of newer presses that ran faster and cheaper but arguably did not match the quality of Hoen's. A. Hoen & Co. became yet another East Baltimore manufacturing plant to shutter, leaving the people of the surrounding neighborhoods without the well-paying jobs they had counted on for generations.

The building, as well as the Collington Square community surrounding it, deteriorated. Other businesses left, vacant row-houses became the norm, and the drug trade flourished. By the 2000s, "vacancy and abandonment had reached extraordinary levels," says Michael Braverman, commissioner of the city's

“There’s something magical about these big, old buildings in terms of how their spiritual and economic impact goes beyond square footage.” —Bill Struever

Department of Housing & Community Development.

The grim landscape of East Baltimore’s boarded-up houses and languishing Hoen building, which the city then owned, was travelers’ first view of Baltimore as they arrived on Amtrak trains from the north. The negative impression was something that particularly bothered developer Bill Struever. As a fervent city booster who had made a career of redeveloping woebegone landmarks, he took it personally.

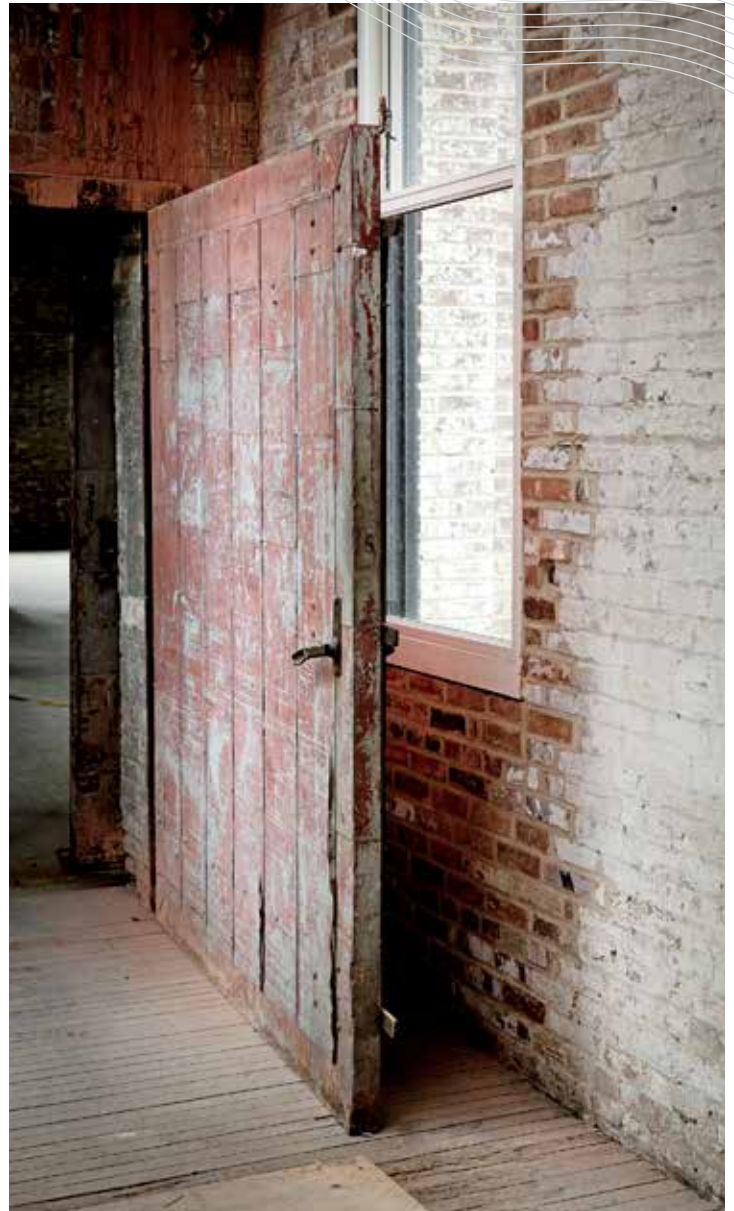
In 2015, when he learned that the city was soliciting requests for proposals for the Hoen complex—six separate buildings encompassing roughly 83,000 square feet—his company, Cross Street Partners, and co-developer City Life Historic Properties applied. By 2016, the buildings were effectively theirs—for just \$200,000.

After meetings with members of the community and Karen D. Stokes, who was then the CEO of nonprofit Strong City Baltimore, the firms decided to redevelop the Hoen campus into a neighborhood hub, filled with agencies that could address local challenges. The complex would offer job training programs, adult education, and offices for community nonprofits and researchers committed to solving Baltimore’s problems. With Strong City involved as both a nonprofit partner and the site’s first tenant, the developers dubbed the complex the Center for Neighborhood Innovation and began the formidable task of trying to recruit other renters to a decrepit property that had sat vacant for 35 years.

But Struever, whose previous firm had redeveloped the crumbling, circa-1887 American Brewery building four blocks north as a home for another community nonprofit, recognized the buildings’ potential. “There’s something magical about these big, old buildings in terms of how their spiritual and economic impact goes beyond square footage,” he says. “We saw it as a great opportunity to demonstrate the power of adaptive reuse in transforming neighborhoods.”

For years, the city has been trying to improve this section of town, selling or auctioning off hundreds of vacant houses for redevelopment and razing hundreds more. Its largest investment sits several blocks southwest of Hoen. Known as East Baltimore Development Inc. (EBDI), the 88-acre public/private development adjacent to Johns Hopkins Hospital aims to establish a biotech hub with shops and housing at a range of prices. Other nearby developments include the Baltimore Food Hub, a culinary incubator sited in a 19th-century water pumping station, and Struever’s American Brewery building (see sidebar on page 40).

“The Hoen building is a bull’s-eye in many ways,” says Braverman, whose agency contributed more than \$1 million to the proj-



As many original details as possible—such as a wooden door to a walkway that connects the Stone and Ink Buildings—were left in place.

ect. Whereas EBDI serves as an economic engine south of the train tracks, Hoen will help drive growth north. “While there are extraordinary areas of distress, it’s poised for near-term transformational growth and revitalization. Our challenge is to ensure that it’s done equitably and that the residents of the Collington Square community will ultimately benefit.”

“The overriding concern was to try not to chop up the building, and to celebrate the unique character of its full length.” —Steve Ziger



The original lettering on Building No. 1, also known as the Stone Building, has been repainted.

Before securing \$28.6 million in financing—which included almost \$15 million in New Markets Tax Credits and federal historic tax credits facilitated by the National Trust Community Investment Corporation (NTCIC), as well as state historic tax credits—the developers hired Baltimore architecture firm Ziger/Snead for the redesign. In the fall of 2016, when partner Steve Ziger first toured the complex, he was taken aback by its physical state.

“You know those photos of [a temple near] Angkor Wat with all the trees growing through the ruins?” asks Ziger. “It kind of looked like that.”

“**It was really** near the tipping point of no return,” says architect Jonathan Lessem of Ziger/Snead, who served as the project

manager. “It was very much overgrown. In Building No. 4, the walls had to be almost rebuilt because trees had grown into them, eating up the mortar and brick. Who is to say how much longer it would have maintained its structural stability?”

Ziger/Snead’s design called for preserving as much of the building’s historic fabric as possible. The firm left intact the massive wooden trusses and brick walls common to all the buildings, except for structures No. 5 and 6, which were made from cinder blocks in the 1960s and served as warehouses.

Building No. 3, which was really just a roof over a concrete slab, would become a central courtyard. The roof was removed, leaving a set of steel beams between buildings 2 and 4. Cross Street Partners Vice President John Renner took a particular fancy to the open space—so much so that he got married among its ruins in 2017. “There was no electricity, no running water, and no bath-



The National Trust Community Investment Corporation (NTCIC), a for-profit subsidiary of the National Trust, supported the Hoen Lithograph redevelopment project with federal historic tax credits, as well as New Markets Tax Credits. **For more information, visit ntcic.com**

rooms,” he says. “I didn’t think my fiancée would go for it.” But she did, and the couple held what would be the first—and likely only—wedding on the site.

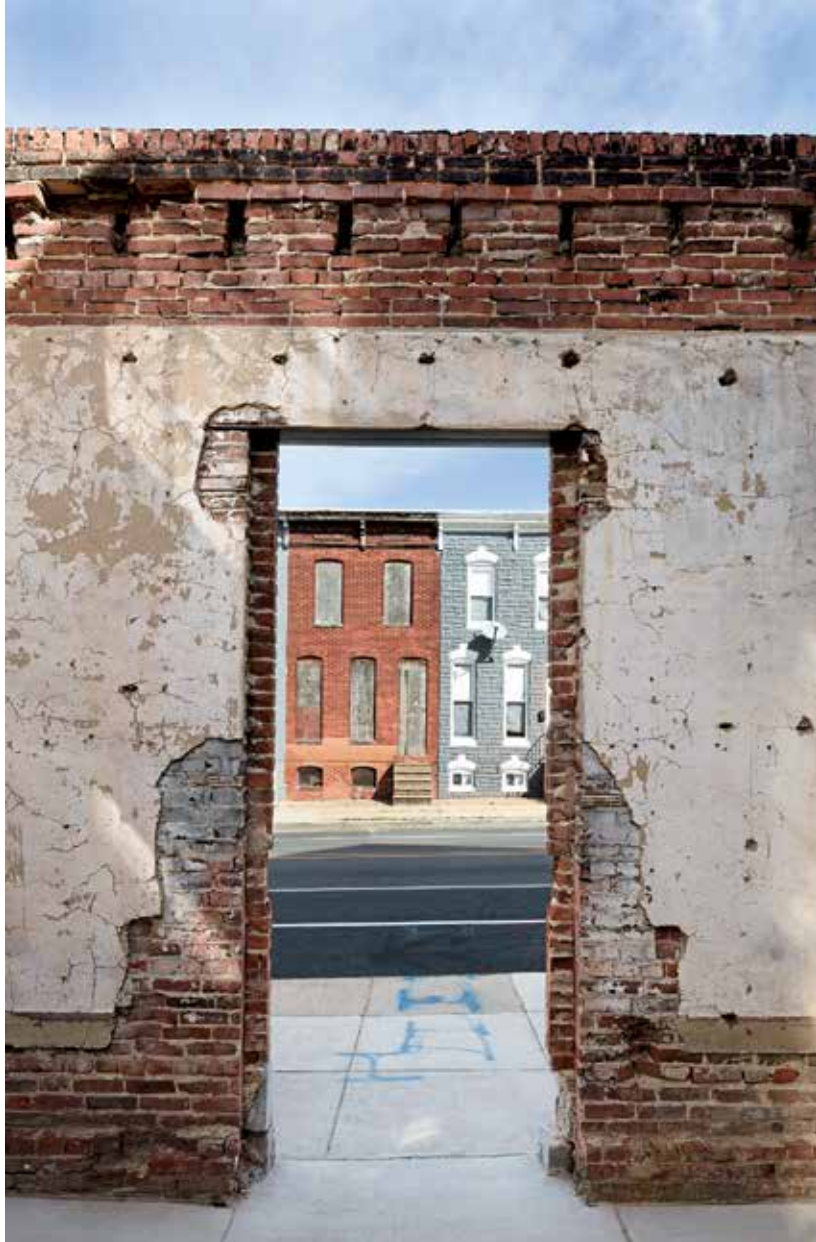
The largest structure, Building No. 1, provided the biggest design challenge for the architects: a 330-foot-long, two-story shell. “We had never done one quite like this,” says Ziger, “but it was just a spectacular opportunity. The overriding concern was to try not to chop up the building, and to celebrate the unique character of its full length.” But the team still had to make the interior functional, integrating modern systems and offices, without compromising the long views.

The architects solved the issue by tucking offices and conference rooms along the east and west perimeters of the building, while adding a mezzanine level beneath the first floor’s 17-foot-high ceilings for additional office space and equipment. That allowed the central corridor to remain wide open, preserving the grand space.

Strong City Baltimore agreed to take over the entire first floor of the structure, which developers dubbed the Stone Building. The agency, which helps other nonprofits manage their finances and hosts adult learning classes, had operated out of a patchwork of rental properties and church basements for much of its 51-year existence. By the time Struever approached Karen Stokes about Hoen, Strong City was ready to consolidate under one roof. “The attraction for us was that we saw huge potential for the neighborhood,” says Stokes, who retired in April after more than 13 years at the organization’s helm. “This used to be a thriving neighborhood; people had jobs. We are not a manufacturer, but by bringing in 400 adult learners, our staff, our community projects, we could help create a demand in the neighborhood. ... How do coffee shops happen? There have to be people. We could be a catalyst for the revitalization of this place.”

The architects divided the Stone Building’s second story into spaces for two tenants. Cross Street Partners claimed one as their new headquarters; the other went to Morgan CARES, a program of Morgan State University’s Center for Urban Health Disparities Research and Innovation, which conducts community-based research on how and why health issues disproportionately affect racial minorities.

From the Stone Building’s second floor, visitors can access the second level of Building No. 2, now called the Ink Building, through an original sliding fire door and a 12-foot-long enclosed bridge. The



approximately 6,400-square-foot second story—complete with original maple floors—has been claimed by OVFX, an animation studio owned by former Baltimore Ravens football player Trevor Pryce. OVFX plans to keep the space wide open. Half of the first floor will house City Life Community Builders, a nonprofit that runs a construction

The complex’s courtyard contains sightlines across East Biddle Street.

“The fact that it could be again a hub of commercial activity and training for the community is just fantastic.” —Tom Hoen

training program for individuals from distressed neighborhoods who have never worked before or who are returning to the workforce after incarceration.

Building No. 4 served as the powerhouse for the campus. Here, a massive coal-fired furnace supplied power for the complex's first occupant, the Baxter Electric Manufacturing and Motor Company, which built engines for street cars beginning in 1885. From 1898 to 1902, the Bagby Furniture Co. produced fine wooden desks and other furniture on the property. Then A. Hoen & Co. moved its printing presses here in 1902 after a fire at its downtown Baltimore location.

The Hoen Lithograph complex wasn't the first abandoned building developer Bill Struever had rescued in East Baltimore. In 2009, Struever's former firm, Struever Bros. Eccles & Rouse, completed work on the American Brewery Building, the 1887 former home of the J.F. Wiessner & Sons Brewing Company. Teaming with architecture firm Cho Benn Holback (now owned by Quinn Evans Architects), the company transformed the derelict, five-story building into a stately headquarters for Humanim, a nonprofit that works to promote economic and social equity in underserved communities.



The adaptive reuse project was partially financed with a \$375,000 loan from the National Trust Loan Fund; the subsidiary that managed this fund has since been dissolved. The National Trust Community Investment Corporation also

provided \$5.4 million in historic and New Markets tax credit equity. The American Brewery Building has garnered numerous awards from preservation groups, including the National Trust, Baltimore Heritage, and the Maryland Historical Trust.

The company dates to 1835, after German immigrants August Hoen and his relative Edward Weber brought with them a unique lithographic process. The method—invented by another German, Alois Senefelder—enabled artists to draw directly on lithographic stone while applying a special ink to produce their prints, eliminating the need for tedious, expensive engraving. August Hoen and his son Albert continued to improve on the process over the years, and the company won a reputation for its finely detailed cartographic

and scientific illustrations. In the 19th century, its maps helped set the boundaries between Canada and the United States, as well as detailing explorer John C. Frémont's expeditions to the American West. In the 20th century, A. Hoen & Co. printed everything from can labels to theatrical broadsides to anatomy posters for Johns Hopkins' medical school.

After the company's demise in 1981, scavengers stripped its buildings of anything of value, including copper pieces from the hulking power transformers in Building No. 4. That caused a leak of PCB chemicals that had to be remediated before construction began. While jackhammering the building's concrete floor, workers

unearthed hundreds of lithographic stones used as backfill. Renner says some of those stones, as well as other artifacts found in the abandoned property—various prints, original wooden storage boxes, and other materials—will be housed in a small museum within the Stone Building's lobby.

Another artifact from Building No. 4 that workers were able to salvage was the furnace's enormous iron facade. The 12-foot-tall, 3,000-pound behemoth was hauled from the powerhouse to an adjacent space. Eventually, it will be preserved and displayed under the guidance of architecture firm Frederick Ward Associates, which is designing the interiors of Buildings 4, 5, and 6 for the Greater Baltimore chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC). The trade association and training organization will have its offices in No. 4, while Nos. 5 and 6 will house its training facility for the construction trades.

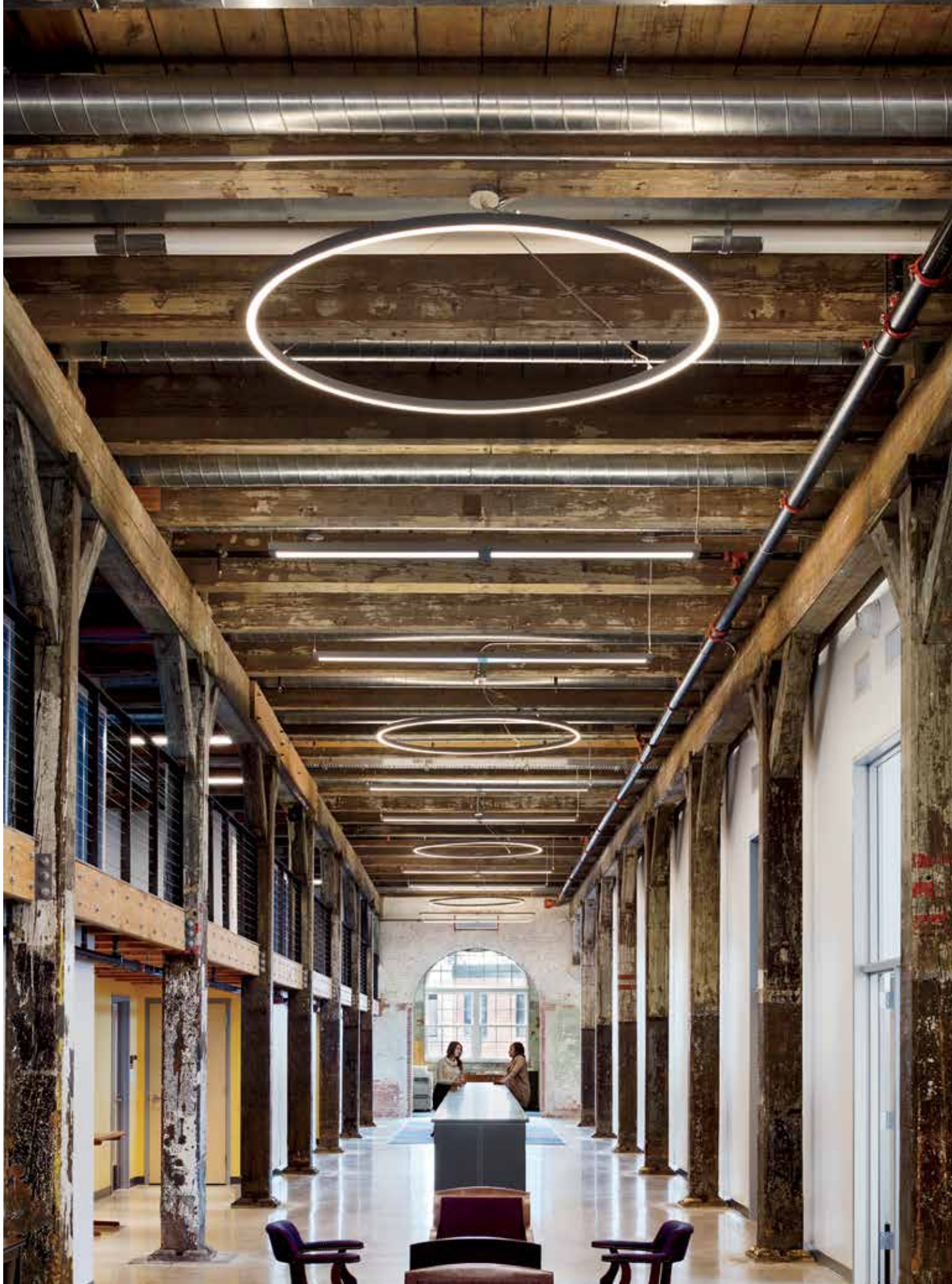
Like Strong City, ABC Greater Baltimore was looking to consolidate its operations in one location after years in the suburbs. “I got a message from Bill Struever, urging me to take a look at the property,” recalls the organization's president, Mike Henderson. “I drove down there, took one look and thought, ‘There's no way we're moving here.’ It was surrounded by shuttered rowhouses. It was overgrown with trees. It was not a nice-looking place. But Bill is a great visionary, a mad-scientist guy who sees

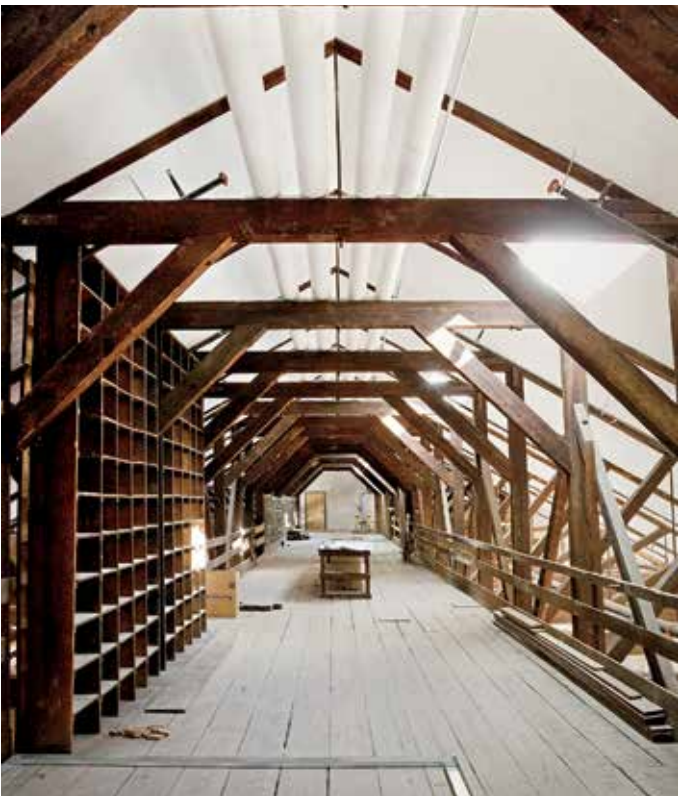
thriving businesses in communities that others don't.”

ABC hopes to acquire some of the neighborhood's vacant rowhouses and allow its apprentices to apply what they've learned in helping fix them up. It would be a win-win both for trainees and the neighborhood, says Henderson.

That's welcome news to teaching assistant Tiffany Turner, who has lived in Collington Square her entire life. The 33-year-old,

Opposite: The long expanses inside Building No. 1 remain intact.





Clockwise from top left: Two unfinished spaces in Building No. 1; Lithography stones found during the rehab.

who works at a Strong City-sponsored after-school and summer program for kids, had always known Hoen as just an ugly old building in the middle of the community. Now she thinks “it looks excellent” and hopes it’ll spur the growth of more restaurants and

stores. “It’s going to make a change for the community,” she says. “There’ll be better opportunities, better jobs. [Strong City has] a GED program in there. It’s going to help people better their lives.”

Perhaps the person most surprised by Hoen’s revival is the guy who used to visit as a kid. “I had really lost hope,” says Tom Hoen, who lives in north Baltimore and works in software development. “I just thought it was going to get knocked down, and somebody would sell the brick. They were such big buildings and in such disrepair. It’s remarkable that somebody had the vision to see how it could be done with the mix of [tenants] and finances, and make it work.”

Hoen’s one disappointment is that his father isn’t around to see

its rebirth. Townsend Hoen, who served as the company’s president for more than 15 years in the 1960s and ’70s, died in 2011. The son says his father was devastated when the family business failed, but he would have been thrilled at the building’s renewal. “He would be ecstatic to know that that building was given a rebirth, particularly with its purpose: something that will have a positive impact on the community, just like A. Hoen did. Most of the workers lived in the neighborhood. The fact that it could be again a hub of commercial activity and training for the community is just fantastic.”

As a bonus, Hoen is tickled that painters restored the original A. Hoen & Co. logo, emblazoned in big white letters on the main building’s sides and smokestack. “Friends of mine who ride the train will call me and say, ‘Hey, did you know there’s a big building down here with your name on it?’”

“Yes,” he’ll tell them. Yes, he does. **P**

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