

Redesigning for hip tenantsTM

CBT has new ideas for old buildings

By **BOB McGOVERN**

Boston's architecture sector has rebounded with a vengeance after the housing bubble burst in 2008, and one firm — using a unique business model focused on younger, hip tenants — has grown exponentially and continues to pick up big-name projects.

CBT Architects, a Boston-based firm with more

than 100 employees, has been named the architect of record for two major redesign projects in the city. It is remodeling The Schrafft Center in Charlestown and retrofitting Center Plaza in Boston for tenants.

"We've been experiencing a fair amount of growth recently, and we've seen an increase in our staff and our workloads recently. We've had a lot of wins," said Haril

Pandya, principal at CBT Architects. "We're trying to position ourselves differently than other design firms in the city."

Part of the plan is "unlocking the value" of properties through a "holistic method" that takes the entire structure into consideration, Pandya said. He said it's important to consider savvy, technology-driven tenants when redesigning



COURTESY RENDERINGS

BIG REDO: Boston-based CBT Architects is doing a major redesign of The Schrafft Center in Charlestown, above and top right, looking to create a 'go-to destination.'

buildings that had housed very different organizations.

"We knew we really had to do something different if we wanted to bring in these millennial tenants into the fray," he said. "The right thing to do is to re-look at the building altogether. When you look at buildings like Schrafft, they love the brick-and-beam, warehouse look, but how do you make it more relevant?"

The Schrafft build-out could take eight to 10 months, Pandya said. Center Plaza — which could house anything from restaurants to a car showroom — could take one to two years to finish.

"We want that property to be a go-to, and not a go-through, destination," he said.

With the new work, CBT has seen phenomenal growth. Pandya's team has gone from five to 25 archi-



itects in the past eight months and has won more than 30 projects during that time.

"We're winning a lot of job projects because I think we're trying to create something new in the design field, and we're working with what the owner sees as value," Pandya said.

Hub architecture firms have seen a strong rebound after the housing bubble burst, according to Boston Society of Architects.

"This is a good time. We're coming off of the recession where a lot of firms



PANDYA

had to put projects on hold because financing got too tight," said Emily Grandstaff-Rice, president of BSA. "Now that financing has been released, and there's interest in developing, the commercial sector is doing really well.

"Architecture firms are hiring, but everyone is still a little cautious after 2008. Not everyone is ready to jump the gun, but things are certainly getting a lot better. There will be growth in Boston firms."

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