

Help Save the Kennedy-Warren



Reprinted below is the letter Patrick Sheary, Curator of Furnishings at the DAR Museum, sent to B.F. Saul to protest their “renovation” plans For the KennedyWarren.

April 8, 2008

Mr. B. Francis Saul II
B.F. Saul Company
7501 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 1500
Bethesda, MD 20814-6522

Dear Mr. Saul:

I was horrified to learn of the threatened status to the historic wing of the Kennedy-Warren—one of Washington’s most important Art Deco buildings. Destroying the interior by removing all original fittings would not only deprive the city of an important part of its cultural legacy, it would also render this esteemed structure nothing more than a mere façade. An historic property is important not only because of attractive exterior elements but also because of its interior, where people live. The interior provides the property a period charm—usually an unspoken aesthetic—but nonetheless appreciated especially because it cannot be replicated today.

This proposed “renovation” is extremely short-sighted and would result in banal interiors framed by cheap drywall, laminate floors and faux wood kitchen cabinets. The current apartment interiors are decorated with a variety of original fittings including multi-tiered kitchen cabinets, built-in china cupboards, solid wood inlaid doors, and even deco-style latches and nameplates just to name but a few. Beautiful bathrooms feature basket-weave tile floors and even original milk delivery cupboards—certainly a rare survival in this city!

Rendering these elements to the junk pile would be a shame since none of these items can be fully replicated today. First, the raw materials—beautiful, resilient, strong old-growth wood—is simply not available at any price. Nor is

the workmanship (American made!) in many of the fittings. Second, the loss of such items would equal millions of dollars in today's market. Certainly the items proposed for destruction are worth more than the \$60 million price tag of renovation. Did you realize the historic original windows you replaced a few years ago would cost millions to replicate today? Instead, the copies will last about 15 years if you're lucky. They will have to be replaced, whereas had the originals been (by the way can be made efficient), they would have lasted forever with proper maintenance.

"Gut job" renovations are also not environmentally sensitive. The waste of both materials and energy to accomplish the "new" look is incalculable. Did you know that plaster walls are more environmentally friendly than drywall? Sensitively easing each original apartment through a careful restoration is by far the green way to go. There is no need or logical reason to remove what is usable and not broken. As we awaken to the fact of global warming, gut job renovations with all their waste will become a thing of the past.

There is a market for historic apartments. Many people prefer apartments of solidly built plaster over those of cheap drywall. Some would kill for some of those original fixtures and architectural touches. I live in a historic building called the Northumberland on New Hampshire Avenue NW. The 70 or so residents of this cooperative are proud of buying into apartments that are historic and retain original features similar to those you are proposing to remove from the Kennedy-Warren. No one in my building is living in a museum, but they appreciate the charm and quality of these older amenities. In fact, we recently restored our historic windows, a decision that will pay us back many times over for another century or more to come.

There are ways to work modernity into historic buildings without destroying the past while doing so. Those of us who respect and appreciate historic preservation are not blind to progress, but we do have our eyes open to those who dismiss the past by ripping it out for no sound reason other than the "need for new."

It is commendable that B.F. Saul Company constructed a beautiful new wing that nicely compliments the old. However, it is now time to think of the historic interiors as marketable assets that will find a modern tenant population who will enjoy them. Please don't destroy our cultural heritage.

Sincerely,

Patrick Sheary
Curator of Furnishings
DAR Museum