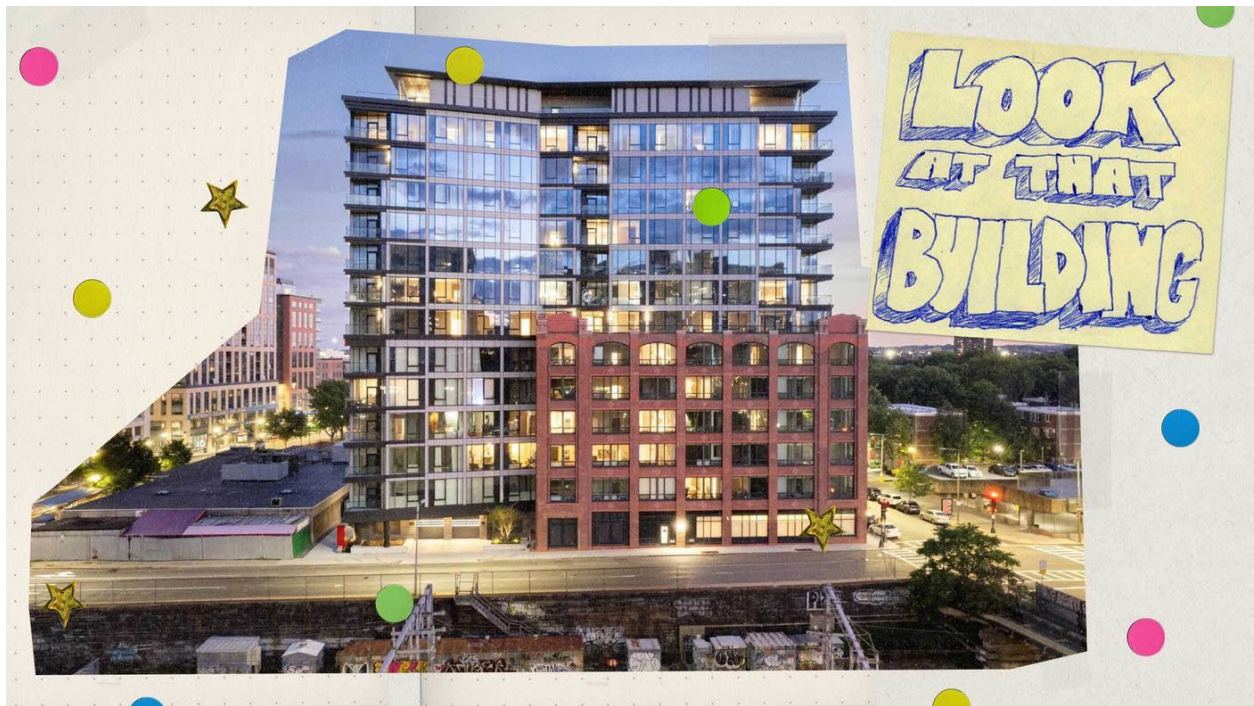


Design: Look at that Building: A Series for the Architecturally Curious

CityLab Design

How to Drop a New Building on Top of an Old One



Something old, something new.

Photos: Ed Wonek courtesy The Architectural Team. Illustration: Stephanie Davidson

The two elements of this Boston condo tower were built more than a century apart. Does this old-new architectural combination hold up?

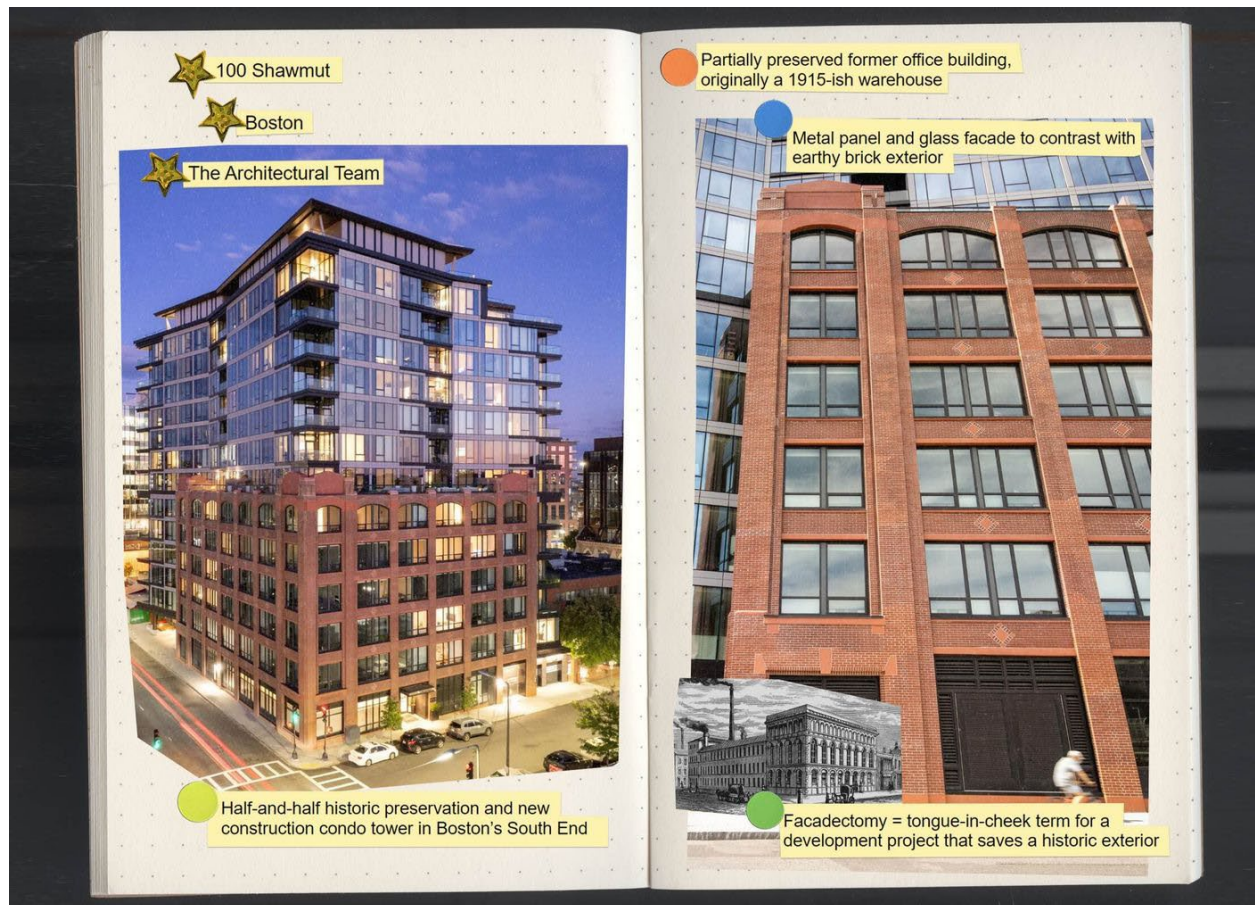
By [Kriston Capps](#)

November 26, 2022

(This story is part of “Look at That Building,” a weekly Bloomberg CityLab series about everyday — and not-so-everyday — architecture. [Read more from the series, and sign up](#) to get the next story sent directly to your inbox.)

Façadectomy. That's the tongue-in-cheek term for a widely unloved architectural compromise that developers sometimes strike: saving the historic veneer of an existing building while demolishing and replacing its internal structure. Façade preservation is especially popular in Washington, DC, where a federal cap on the height of buildings and the strength of the preservationist cause locally makes the case for adapting existing structures, even at great expense.

Façadism is rarer where cheaper tear-downs are possible, but over the last 40 years, this trend hit its stride on the East Coast. Prominent examples include the Spanish Embassy in DC and the Penn Mutual tower in Philadelphia.



Photos: Ed Wonsek courtesy The Architectural Team. Illustration: Stephanie Davidson

A new condo tower in Boston's South End isn't a typical façadectomy. The development at 100 Shawmut Avenue looks as if a glassy modern building had been plopped down on top of an old warehouse. According to Tom Schultz, associate for The Architectural Team, the Boston-area firm behind the project, the case for incorporating a six-story warehouse into a new residential project wasn't merely aesthetic. The site and structure lent itself to building up.

“It was part of the peninsula that was between the marshes right when Boston came to be,” says Schultz, referring to the land between Shawmut Avenue and old Washington Street. “That means we had one of the best soils in Boston.”

Call it façade preservation 2.0: Completed in 2021, the 138-unit development at 100 Shawmut saves the exterior of what was once a warehouse built around 1915. But it also incorporates much of the building’s structure as loft-style residences, using its original skeleton to support a larger mid-rise addition. The result is a 13-story market-rate project, the first of three phases that also includes affordable housing.

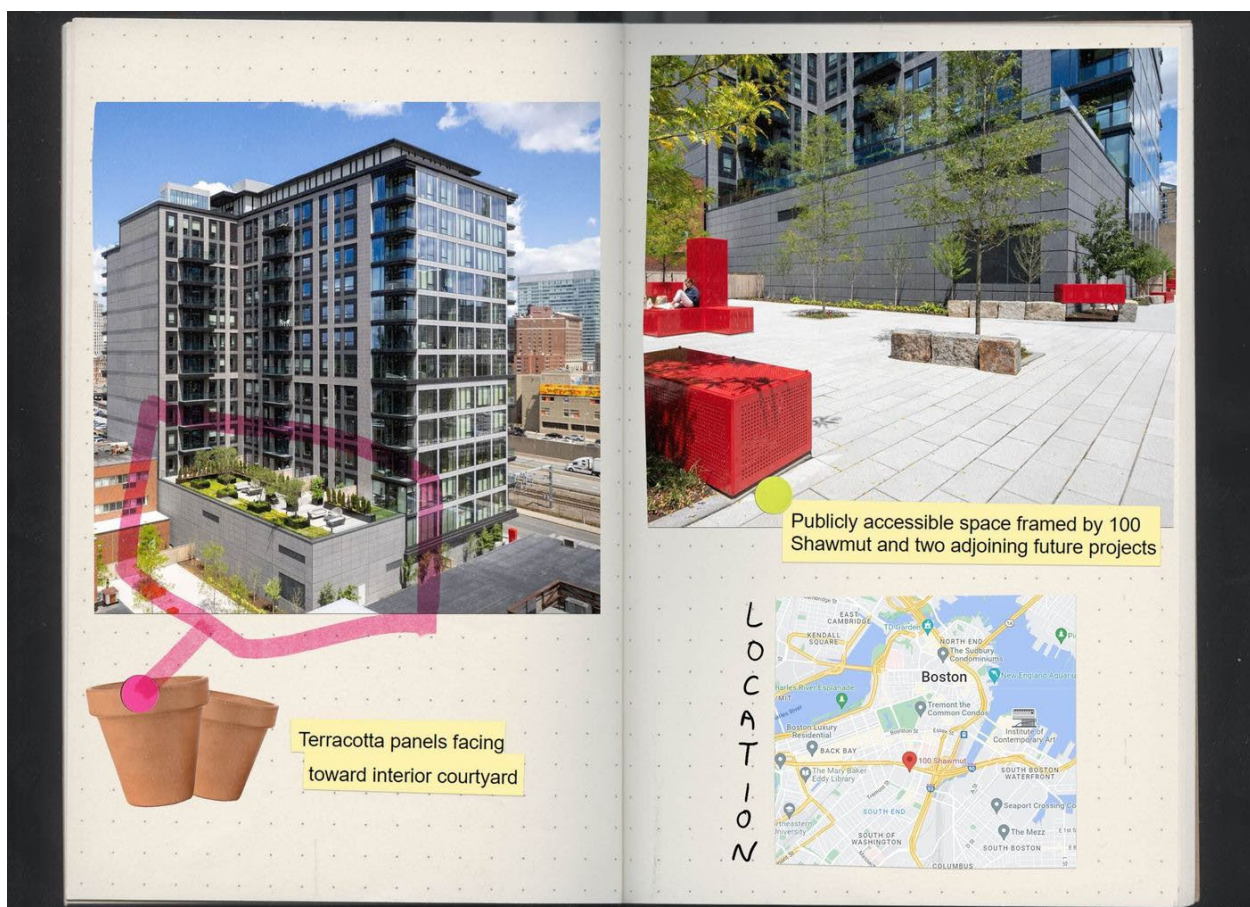


Photos: Ed Wonsek courtesy The Architectural Team. Illustration: Stephanie Davidson

The Architectural Team served as the designer for this building as well as the planner for the overall site. The scope of this project was made possible by a special zoning overlay, known as a planned development area, that’s available for Boston projects greater than an acre in size. It’s a negotiation with the city that involves various incentives and tradeoffs for density, affordability and community benefits — and in this case, historic preservation, since the site falls within the South End Landmark District and Harrison-Albany Protection Area.

While the process is formally complicated, the goal of a planned development area is to streamline the delivery of buildings that exceed conventional restrictions. “We’d never have been able to get the density that we have, if we didn’t do that,” Schultz says.

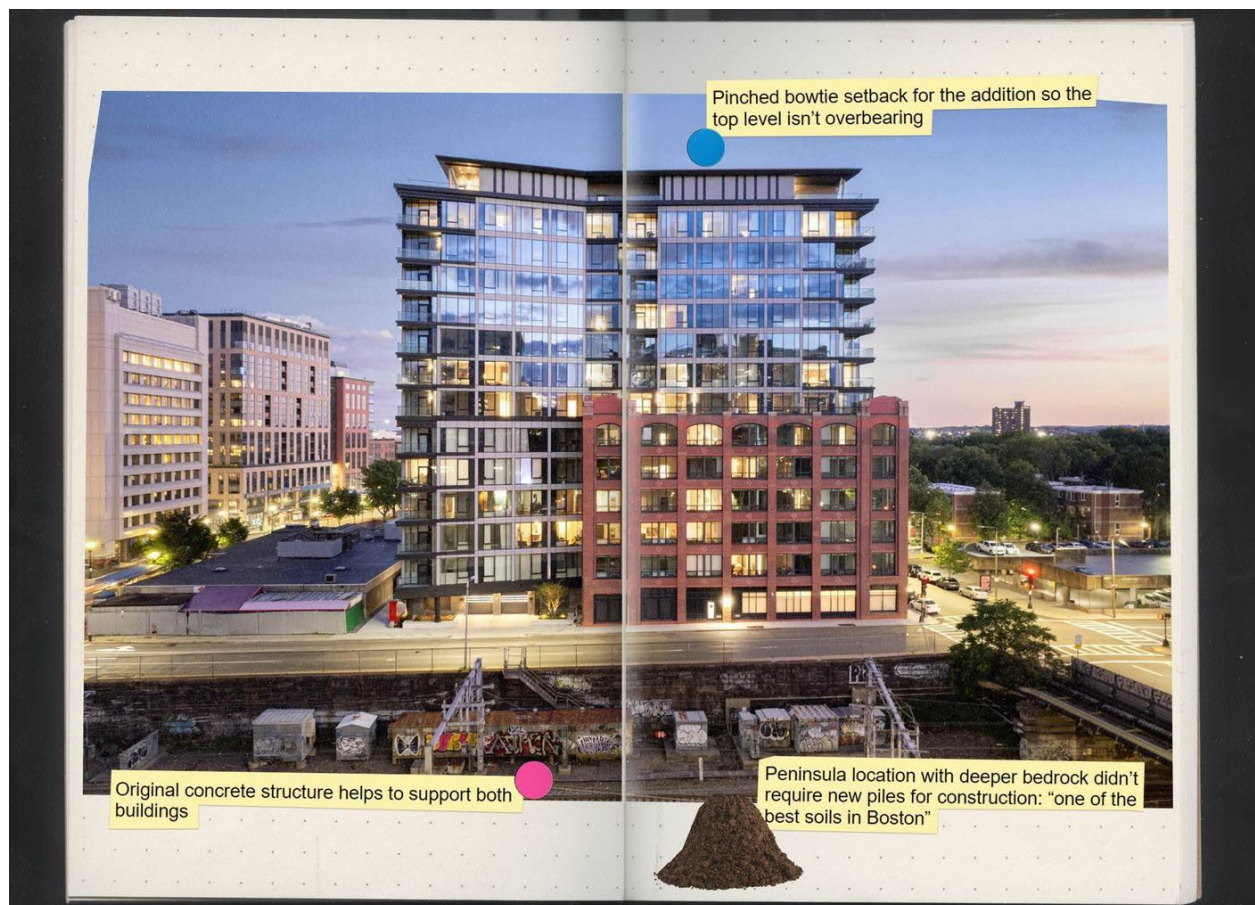
The Shawmut Avenue–Washington Street block is unique for this kind of zoning overlay in Boston because it’s a project by three property owners, not just one. The project started when the developers, the Davis Companies, acquired the six-story building in 2015 (which at that time served as nonprofit offices). The original plan called for upgrading the structure to Class A office space. Instead, the developer linked up with two nonprofit neighbors — the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and the Boston Chinese Evangelical Church — to build a major mixed-use development with extensive subsidized housing.



Photos: Ed Wonsek courtesy The Architectural Team. Illustration: Stephanie Davidson

For the architects, the challenge of 100 Shawmut involved converting a 100-foot-by-100-foot warehouse into a space suitable for housing — or “turning a square building into an L-shaped building,” as Schultz puts it. Such a square shape would put windows out of reach for interior residences. The Architectural Team demolished part of the building to make the scheme work. From an engineering standpoint, the concrete core of the existing building ties the entire

structure together. The building didn't require new piles during construction, but instead used a large mat footing foundation to connect the existing and new structures.



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Since the warehouse structure hugs the street, the new top has a pinched bowtie shape to provide some visual relief without giving up too much floor space. Glass and metal panels mark the exterior on the side facing the streets, while terracotta panels serve as a warmer face toward an interior courtyard, a public space that will eventually be shared by all three buildings. (The Architectural Team is involved with one of the next two phases.)

The design for 100 Shawmut couples something old with something new. Units in the original podium structure have tall ceilings, deep dens and concrete columns with mushroom capitals — historical touches that appeal to fans of loft living. The newer units are sleeker, with better views. The two options allow the building to reach tenants with different tastes.

“From a buyer standpoint, it gave us a nice cross section of folks that are looking for a very glassy high-end new construction,” says Schultz, “or someone that was looking for maybe something a little grittier.”