

Retailers reclaiming Monticello Arcade

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Early tenants on the ground floor of the Monticello Arcade, which opened in downtown Norfolk in 1908, were hat makers, cobblers, tailors and other small merchants.

Though the sky-lit mall has been predominately used in the last decade or two for professional office space, retailers have recently reclaimed the historic structure's street level.



Located in the 200 block of East City Hall Avenue, between City Hall Avenue and Plume Street, the Monticello Arcade is one of only two original shopping arcades standing in Virginia, according to a history of the building found on its National Registry of Historic Places nomination form, which dates back to 1975. The other is in Richmond.

It is also one of the last examples of a commercial building form popular throughout the 19th century.

Though the oldest, it's not to be confused with the Selden Arcade, another business mall located downtown on Main Street, which is home to d'Art Center, d'egg Diner and Starbucks.

The Selden Arcade opened in September 1880, but was destroyed by a fire on April 4, 1930. Though it was rebuilt and reopened to the public on April 28, 1931, it is not, historically, considered one of the original arcades.

"It was originally built as a theater and then as the Selden Arcade afterwards, but it is unique that Norfolk has two and that both are still standing," said William Inge, a Norfolk building historian with Norfolk Public Library's Sargeant Memorial Collection.

Owned by Hart Gary and a number of limited partners known as the Monticello Limited Partnership, the Monticello Arcade is managed by Marc Poutasse, president of Cavalier Land.

The three-story building has 31 tenants, and has become a retail hub. The directory includes Nest Home Inc., which does custom framing, custom-made furniture, as well as gifts and accessories for the home; Ibo's Tailor Shop; Smooth Inc., a skin and waxing boutique; VIP Nail Salon; Studio Posy, a custom floral design studio; Monticello Shoes; and Salon Fringe, which completed an expansion on July 1, doubling its size on the Plume Street side of the arcade.

"We added 800 square feet," said salon owner Kevin Davis. "We currently have five stylists working for us, including myself."

Since opening the shop three years ago in April, Davis said he has utilized a number of businesses within the arcade. Weekly flower deliveries come from Studio Posy. The retail desk, makeup counter and purse hooks were built by Nest Home. And he visits Smooth for facials and skin care products.

With the addition of Chartreuse Bistro, scheduled to open on the East City Hall Avenue side the week of July 22, the ground floor will be fully leased.

Though Poutasse would not say how much space is vacant, a property listing on CoStar.com listed total office space available at 2,080 square feet - 1,180 square feet on the second floor and 900 square feet on the third floor. Total, the building is 41,601 square feet and tenants say rental rates are reasonable. On CoStar, office space is listed at \$14 per square foot, per year, and spaces, or bays, range from 300 to 900 square feet.

Anna Akers, who owns Lorak Jewelry & Gifts, opened inside the arcade in April. Though the building is beautiful, the jeweler said she wishes more people knew about the arcade.

"I'm across from Smooth and next to Nest," she said. "It's a little sleepy. It's pretty new for it to have retail shops in it. People are used to just offices."

The space has long been home to professional offices. The line-up includes Sams & Gilchrist LLC, State Farm, Kenneth B. Wills Attorney at Law, Mol America Inc. and Rawls McNelis + Mitchell PC, to name a few.

Work Program Architects just happened to locate in the birthplace of several other successful architecture firms including WPL and John Paul Hanbury & Co., which merged with another firm to become Hanbury Evans Wright Vlattas & Co.

March marked WPA's two-year anniversary since opening along East Plume Street in the Monticello Arcade. The company just completed a renovation

and expansion of its space in the historic building.

"We took three more bays in the arcade on the west side," said WPA owner Thom White.

The addition created space for a conference room and an art gallery - Nobile & Amundsen - curated by White's friends John Sebastian Vitale and Nikki Leone. The inaugural show opened June 21. Adding the gallery, White said was a way for WPA to fill what otherwise would have been an empty, white cube and contribute to the arcade in a way that's beautiful and authentic to Norfolk.

Retailers are hoping people stop in and take a look at what the arcade has to offer.

"It's such an architectural charm downtown," Davis said. "Just walk through on your lunch break some day." nib

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