

Category 4 Best Building Project — Specialty Contractor (Under \$2 Million)
Contractor — Concepts in Millwork Inc.
Project Name — Renaissance Denver Downtown City Center Hotel

BRINGING HISTORY BACK TO LIFE

*Custom architectural elements crafted by **Concepts in Millwork** help transform the iconic Colorado National Bank building into a modern masterpiece in the heart of the city.*

Walking through the large bronze doors into the grand skylighted three-story atrium of the new Renaissance Denver Downtown City Center hotel feels like being transported back in time, when Denver's bustling city streets were lined with brilliantly lit theaters, and the energetic hum and rattle of electric trolley cars competed with idling Model Ts. Built in 1915 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Colorado National Bank building at 17th and Champa emerged in the industrial era of pre-war prosperity, glitz and glamour. Today, visitors to the Mile High City's newest downtown destination will be just as impressed, as the innovative adaptive reuse of the old iconic bank building welcomes guests to an equally stunning modern experience.

After standing vacant for four years, local hospitality-development firm Stonebridge purchased the property in 2009 and chose Klipp Architecture and Alliance Construction Solutions to make its lofty redevelopment vision a reality. **Concepts in Millwork, Inc.** joined the team, and ultimately played a key role in its success. Millwork is very often the piece of a project that draws a person's eye; it's the element noticed and talked about, which means there is not even an eighth-inch of room for error. The specialty contractor's heightened attention to detail and expert coordination with other trades helped to accentuate the building's past, while the time-honored skills of the millwork craftsmen created intricate elements to punctuate its future.

Among Denver's neoclassical masterpieces, the bank building's Greek revival architecture and premiere location give it an important place in the city's rich history. Famed local architects William and Arthur Fisher prepared more than 135 pages of typed specifications and 44 architectural drawings on waxed linen paper for its composition in snow-white Colorado Yule marble—the same stone used to build the Lincoln Memorial. The building's lobby is home to 16 restored murals painted in the 1920s by Colorado artist Allen Tupper True depicting the lives of

American Indians on the Plains. These and other elements of the original design are showcased and juxtaposed with the accommodations, amenities and comforts of Denver's new luxury hotel.

The hotel's stunning three-story skylighted lobby is rimmed by bank-offices-turned-hotel-rooms and topped by two new floors to accommodate a total of 230 guest rooms, each with exquisitely crafted furnishings. Original bank vaults have been turned into beautiful conference rooms and a boardroom as if by magic, with intricate wood framing on original sliding metal doors. Three bars, table seating, front desk and hostess stands, a sundry shop, beautiful bookshelves, a wine tower, base and door casings, wall paneling, and a slew of other specialty elements fabricated by *Concepts* all "pop" to make this historic redevelopment a work of art.

Clear and frequent communication with other trades was a key to the project's success throughout the intricate millworking process. *Concepts in Millwork* played an instrumental role in coordinating the installation of the 24-foot Teller Bar, where exact precision was necessary between the millwork, electrical and stone components. Located in the hotel's lobby and aptly named for the bank tellers who once stood where the bar is now situated, this stunning centerpiece highlights *Concepts'* sophisticated coordination skills to combine elements of multiple trades. The millwork team worked to fabricate and install the bar components to fit with the sheet lighting and specialty glass. Design changes required multiple measurements to ensure the completed product was calculated to 1/16 inch and fit 100% snugly. The onsite millwork team worked in collaboration with the other trades, while simultaneously coordinating with its in-house staff to ensure an on-time delivery of the no-room-for-error design.

The wood paneling was the last piece of the puzzle on many of the building's newly constructed walls—and it was crucial for everyone to know the thickness of how materials would be applied and the tolerances needed, as well as the space between the unmovable columns. The millwork component required extremely precise detailing—as these high quality elements had to fit perfectly within the built environment. *Concepts in Millwork* continually double-checked the work of other trades to ensure walls were in the correct place and the right thickness. At times other trades needed to rebuild in order for elements to meet these specific requirements and allow *Concepts* successful installation that coordinated with the owner's historic vision.

Late in the project, last-minute design changes required **Concepts** to make adjustments to cabinetry to allow a unique heating element to be added to the countertops and fit within the existing framework. *“This project worked much like a design-build approach,”* explained **Concepts** Project Manager Rich Schwartz. *“We partnered with the owner, discussing design details and incorporating material, engineering and timeline changes into our schedule on a weekly basis to tweak the plans to meet the owner’s very specific and detailed vision.”*

Although not required for this project, **Concepts** built all of the cabinetry to meet Architectural Woodwork Institute (AWI) standards. One of the firm’s common practices, this ensures each woodworking element is of premiere quality and design. As an added benefit to the owner, **Concepts** millworkers have the distinction of being certified by the AWI Quality Certification Program, which ensures projects are built to higher-than-usual industry standards.

*“In complicated projects such as this one, the fact that **Concepts** came to the table with an open mind—whether with design issues or the desire to achieve the intended goal—enabled the process to go as smoothly as a project can. The attitudes and professionalism from **Concepts** made the project a success,”* said Jerry Arndt, Stonebridge owner’s representative.

Concepts in Millwork worked with the project team managers and owner’s representative to ensure that the hotel’s western-themed Range restaurant featured many not-commonly-used materials to create a “Colorado chic” experience. One of these unique elements included the design and construction of handcrafted concrete countertops married with acrylic-faced panels and metal accents. **Concepts** was also presented with a box of horseshoes (seemingly fresh from the stable), and worked with their metals specialist to cleverly turn them into a fantastic piece of art that highlights the adventurous spirit of the American West. Barn wood was used to create accent walls throughout the restaurant and incorporated into the bar, adding to the rustic atmosphere. Hickory and zebra wood lend a high-end flair.

The **Concepts in Millwork** team worked 2,500 hours injury-free. Safety is a priority on every **Concepts** project—large or small. Even as a specialty contractor, the firm employs a safety manager to keep employees in all departments up to date with safety rules and requirements.

This is key not only for the safety of **Concepts** employees, but for the entire project team; millwork installers on this project worked around other trades in tight quarters to ensure deadlines were safely met. Weekly toolbox talks and safety reviews were conducted with the entire team, ultimately ensuring **Concepts** maintained its reputation as an injury-free firm. Although not required on this project, **Concepts in Millwork** used only NAUF (no added urea formaldehyde) materials to honor indoor air quality, another of the firm's standard practices.

Built by 160 craftsmen at a cost of \$500,000*, the old Colorado National Bank building was born at a time of exciting change for the city—and for Colorado. Robert Speer, Denver's "City Beautiful" mayor was newly elected to his third term, and President Woodrow Wilson had just signed a bill creating Rocky Mountain National Park. The dazzling new bank building stood as a symbol of the city's center of commerce, an area of downtown then known as the "Wall Street of the Rockies." As luck would have it, today's Renaissance Denver Downtown City Center is just blocks from the bustling 16th Street pedestrian mall, vibrant Convention Center, and a 2014 version of yesteryear's glittering theater district—the impressive Denver Center for Performing Arts—all within steps of a 21st century light rail line and the impressive newly renovated Union Station transit hub, bringing the building full-circle in the life of this world-renown city.

Concepts in Millwork's talented craftsmen combined their eye for detail and architectural integrity with a nod to the building's past to ensure its new role will live on, providing preservationists, businesspeople and tourists an updated version of this rare piece of Denver history. Create Films and Jackie Shumaker Photography are producing a documentary to be broadcast by PBS and shown at film festivals sharing the building's fascinating tale of vision, determination and collaboration through its rich history and contemporary reinvention.

"We are proud to give one of Denver's most beloved local landmarks new life as a Renaissance Hotel. There is something special about being able to help connect visitors to the city with a piece of its past. We hope to provide them a modern experience in a historic setting that is completely unique to Denver," said Navin Dimond, president/CEO, Stonebridge Companies.

*Source: Historic Denver Inc.







