

Category: 4 - Best Building Project—Specialty Contractor (under \$2million)

Contractor: Metropolitan Glass, Inc.

Project Name: Colorado Building

## **One Very Misunderstood Building**

Referred to by some as a monstrosity, an eyesore, a beast, or a monument to architectural pornography - the Colorado Building was the first major building constructed in downtown Boulder after 1930 and remains one of Boulder's only high-rise buildings. Controversy notwithstanding, this building embodies unique historic value to the City of Boulder. It has recently been renovated to bring back the historic integrity to reflect a more appealing and neutral appearance with improvements that provide sustainable efficiencies.

Designed by prominent Boulder architect James M. Hunter, the nine-story Colorado Building is one of downtown Boulder's most prominent visual landmarks. Completed in 1957, it was the first private building project to exceed \$1,000,000 in the city of Boulder. The building, measuring approximately 100 ft. in height, was erected before Boulder imposed a height restriction of 55 ft. in 1972. The tallest building in downtown Boulder is located on the corner of 14th and Walnut one block off of the Pearl Street mall and across from the RTD Transit Station.

The property was designed and constructed for a developer named by Allen J. Lefferdink, a Boulder businessman who started several enterprises and was subsequently convicted of misusing funds and sent to prison. Lefferdink, who was a pioneer of the postwar consumer credit industry, had his office in the penthouse and would come and go by a helicopter that landed on the rooftop helipad. In 1959, just two years after the building was completed, Lefferdink declared bankruptcy and was charged with fraud. He was forced to sell in 1960.

The building underwent a series of alterations in the 1980s, including reconfiguration of the façade of the west pavilion and replacement of the glazing system. The large metal side panels received a polychrome paint scheme in several bright colors in the 1980's which some felt resembled a psychedelic checker board and the contemporary awning was added around 2008.

This mishmash of alterations invoked strong opinions of this iconic structure from Boulder citizens who wanted nothing more than to see this eyesore removed from the skyline.

It's hard to appreciate a building with such a sketchy beginning, but when it offers the best views of the Flatirons and surrounding cities, you have to give it another chance. Which is just what the W. W. Reynolds company has done. After purchasing the Colorado Building in 2007, W. W. Reynolds secured landmark status for the property and most recently engaged a committed team, including Metropolitan Glass Incorporated, to complete an extensive renovation, including returning the building to its historic original color.

From the beginning, challenges arose. Due to its landmark status, the renovation had to be not only approved by the City of Boulder, but by the landmark commission as well. These approvals took so long, that the summer project turned into a winter project – not a small issue when opening up a historic structure in wind-prone Boulder. The entire team worked collaboratively to address high winds, freeze issues, and water infiltration on a building renovation that was also partially occupied.

Colorado owned and operated Metropolitan Glass Incorporated (MGI) rose to the challenge. Working with the construction team, MGI closely studied the original construction used in the existing curtain wall and discovered that the window panels sat independent of it while clip extensions held them in place. Through close collaboration with Wyatt Construction over six months, the team hammered out 4-5 different iterations of the framing design to match the frame profile of the historic building while meeting Boulder's strict energy codes.

The challenge was to create a new system that visually matched a building built sixty years ago but performs to today's standards. As with any renovation project, there's only so much planning you can do before you open it up and see what you've got.

The nine-story building features red brick walls that bookend a glass and aluminum curtain wall that is composed of alternating horizontal bands of glass and painted panels. Due to the way these elements were installed, the building renovation had to be completed in vertical sections.

Once the team opened up their first section, they discovered that the metal panels were held into the aluminum frame with asbestos caulking. This discovery required a massive staging effort to bring in asbestos removal and abatement services at the beginning of every vertical column removal.

This proved tricky as tenants were located in the building on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor and had to be relocated every time construction on a section began. The team worked quickly by taking down the vertical aluminum tubes a column at a time and replacing the floor to ceiling glass by retrofitting a new window system into an existing shell built 60-years ago. To compound the complexity, a special window system was created by Manko Windows that had never been used before. The system was designed and engineered specifically for this building and required a tight team effort to make it all work.

The building site presented unique safety challenges, as well. The project is located in downtown Boulder in a prominent location so concerns for adjacent properties and pedestrians required extremely tight safety protocols and precautions. In addition, the renovation required that the building be opened up a column at a time from the top floor to the bottom which necessitated barricades at every floor at every opening be established. Each time work was to begin in a new section of the building, a safety meeting was held to discuss how to mitigate risk for the specific work that had to be done. For MGI, these extra efforts resulted in over 10,000 hours worked on the job without lost time or injury.

The Colorado Building is a significant landmark for the City of Boulder as it is a representation of the work of Boulder architect James M. Hunter, who also designed the Boulder Municipal Building, the Masonic Temple, and the Boulder Public Library. It is significant as Boulder's first skyscraper and having been the first major downtown building erected in Boulder after 1930. The building holds a unique place in Boulder as the only significant Modern high-rise tower downtown and is a big-city high rise scaled down to match the small town in which it was built. And now, it has been returned to its original design intent to a more appealing and neutral appearance.

In spite of the many challenges, The Colorado Building renovation has been a success for all involved in the project. The structure's reinstated blue glass and aluminum façade better reflects its unique historic value and hopefully brings citizens to a place to better understand this building that holds so much history for the City of Boulder.









