



TRADITIONAL BUILDING

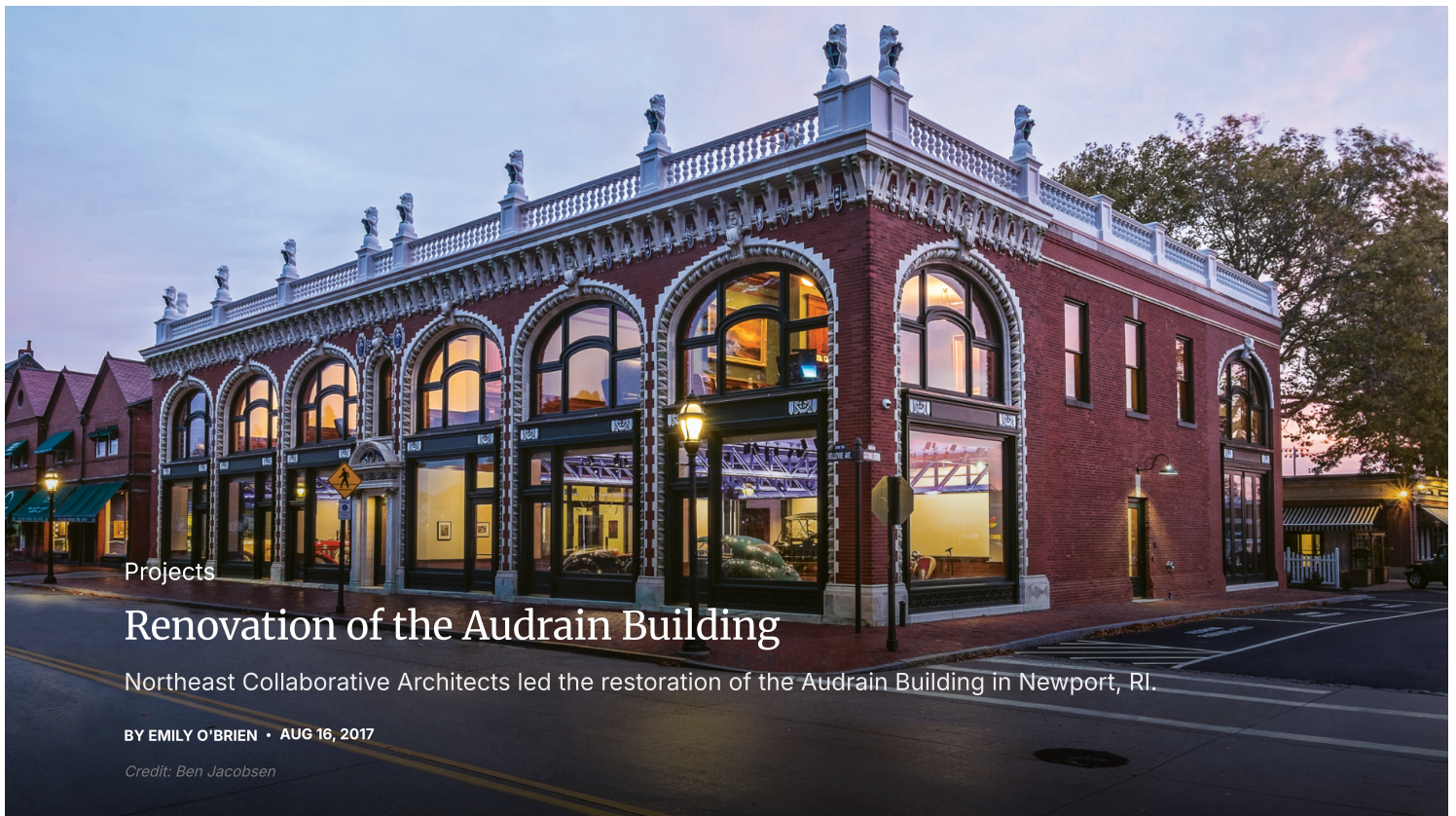
[Subscribe](#) [E-Newsletters](#) [Get A Free Listing](#)

[Browse Our Digital Edition
Inspired Design](#)

[Building Tradition Podcast
Listen Now](#)
[Buying Guides](#) [Opinions](#) [The Magazine](#) [News](#) [Projects](#) [Features](#) [Product Reports](#) [Palladio Awards](#)



Hartstone
CUSTOM CONCRETE ELEMENTS
704-905-0583

[Home](#) / [Projects](#)

[Projects](#)

Renovation of the Audrain Building

Northeast Collaborative Architects led the restoration of the Audrain Building in Newport, RI.

BY EMILY O'BRIEN • AUG 16, 2017

Credit: Ben Jacobsen

[SHARE THIS STORY](#)

Project: Renovation of the Audrain Building, Newport, RI

Architect: [Northeast Collaborative Architects](#), Newport, RI; John Grosvenor, AIA, Principal; Dan Herchenroether, RA, Project Manager

Primary Contractor/Builder/Developer: [Parker Construction, Rumford, RI](#)

Interior Design: Northeast Collaborative Architects



Now restored back to its original condition, the historic building once again has its rooftop balustrade and lions that were destroyed by a hurricane. New arched windows were installed and the intricate terra cotta ornamentation was restored back to its original condition. *Ben Jacobsen*

Designed by renowned architect Bruce Price, the [1903 Audrain Building](#) is one of four major structures on the architecturally significant block of Bellevue Avenue in Newport, RI. Adolphe L. Audrain (1859-1940), an art and antiques dealer, commissioned Price to design the office and retail building. Neighboring buildings on the distinguished Gilded Age block include the 1876 Travers Building, designed by Richard Morris Hunt, the 1882 Newport Casino, by McKim, Mead, and White, and the 1892 King Block, by Perkins and Betton. Price looked to the Florentine Renaissance to design the two-story edifice, defined by broad arched windows rising through both stories, with a roofline polished with a white terra-cotta balustrade with lion sculptures. Faced in red brick with jewel-toned terra-cotta trim that heightens the entry, bays, and roofline, the original layout featured six retail shops on the first floor and 11 offices on the second.



The balustrade and lion sculptures were lost or removed around the time the hurricane came through in 1938, and so began a slow decline of its grandeur. John Grosvenor, AIA, Principal, Northeast Collaborative

Architects says, "The project allowed a preservation opportunity to recreate the terra-cotta lion sculptures and balustrade that once adorned the building. The use of sculptural caricatures harkens back to the ancient civilizations and added a significant highlight to this most celebrated urban corridor."



Shown here before the renovation, the 1903 Audrain Building was originally designed in the Beaux Arts style by renowned architect Bruce Price. It is one of five architecturally significant landmarks situated on the historic block of Bellevue Avenue in Newport, RI. NCA

Replicating and replacing missing terra-cotta required a bit of detective work, using historic photographs for directional clues. "The terra-cotta exterior detailing is both unusual and quite beautiful in its rich array of color and glazed pottery texture. The large-scale arches with the expansive display windows are a lovely counterpoint to the vernacular shingle style landmark buildings within the same block," says Grosvenor. The terra-cotta elements, including the balustrade and lions, were created by Boston Valley Terra Cotta of Orchard Park, NY. The new lions were sculpted by Allison Newsome of Warren, RI. Using historic photos, she first rendered the lion in clay in a ¼ scale model before sculpting it full size. Plaster molds were then created so that the 12 lions could be reproduced. Each lion weighs 350 pounds and is made of 16 pieces.

Over time, the first-floor interior retail shops transitioned into medical offices, and the second floor commercial tenants made little improvements, leaving the level lackluster at best. In November 2013, Northeast Collaborative Architects (NCA) was commissioned to renovate the second-story offices into summer headquarters for a Fortune 500 company. In February of the following year, the architects were enlisted to transform the first floor into an auto museum, showcasing the client's prestigious collection of rare antique automobiles.

The museum showcases a maximum of 18 rare automobiles, with exhibits rotating every three months. *Ben Jacobsen*

The new project was no small feat, requiring the restructuring of the entire building. To complicate matters, it was placed on a parallel track to designing the upstairs summer headquarters. Instead of the 16,000-sq.ft. commercial building taking what would normally be a three-year span to complete, it was fast-tracked and finished in less than a year.

"It was a challenging program change for a complex preservation project," says Grosvenor. "The main floor had to be reinforced to support the weight of the cars and a door had to be installed to accommodate the installation of cars." This complex project—in a high profile historic district with a significant amount of pedestrian traffic—presented quite a challenge.



The museum involved even more challenges: removing all of the existing bearing walls, shoring the structure, reinforcing the floor to accommodate triple load bearing tongue-and-groove Douglas fir decking, and installing steel powder coated, fire rated trusses. New impact resistant glass replaced all old windows.

To allow automobiles access to the building, the south elevation was redesigned to include a custom fit two-story arched opening. The neighboring [Ocean House Hotel](#) once hid the south elevation of the Audrain Building; however, in the 19th century, the hotel was destroyed by a fire, exposing it. The design

team enhanced the sparse elevation with a large two-story opening, three double-hung windows, and a new fire stair. "Also, removing the load-bearing walls to make enough space to exhibit 18 cars, required reinforcing the museum space with new steel trusses," says Grosvenor "We had a bit of fun with the first-floor column connections by designing a larger column utilizing four steel angle brackets around a 6×6 structural steel post.

The barrel-vaulted ceiling in the main corridor of office space shows off the custom millwork found throughout the building. *Ben Jacobsen*

This wider column looks proportionally better to receive the double truss width while providing vertical lighting slots that conceal the reflected LED lights," he adds. Grosvenor wanted the automobiles to be the focal points in the exhibition space, but felt this was challenging with the building's regal exterior. "So I strove to make the interior monochromatic and peaceful with dark planked flooring, dark wainscoting and painted plaster walls. The newly structured steel truss ceiling with LED lights provides a stage house effect to showcase the extraordinary car collection," he says. Northeast Collaborative Architects also added public restrooms to the building.

"Completed in 1903, the Audrain Building literally saw the advent of horseless carriages and cars on Bellevue Avenue. Many of the wealthy families who summered in Newport had the luxury of owning cars as early as the 1890s," says executive director of the Audrain Automotive Museum, David de Muzio.

An enormous custom-made table with seating for 34 people as well as a new fireplace recall a private club tone for the conference room on the second floor. State-of-the-art video conferencing systems are concealed behind elegant wooden panels. *Ben Jacobsen*

He points out that the area was very important to the early history of the automobile. "The turn of the century saw William "Willy" K. Vanderbilt and his friends begin to acquire and race cars. First on Bellevue Avenue, where the first speeding ticket was issued, on the local beaches, and onto the Aquidneck horse track, where the first organized auto racing in America happened in what became the [Vanderbilt Cup races](#)," he adds.



The museum serves as an integral part of the non-profit museum scene on Bellevue Avenue's "Museum Mile," and is the second highest attended museum in Newport, with nearly 30,000 visitors last year, according to de Muzio.

Second Floor Interior

The client requested the office interiors emulate an early 20th-century club. "The bold concept called for reconfiguring the layout to accommodate a new Carrara marble lobby, wrought iron caged elevator, a 20×20-ft. leaded-glass skylight, barrel-vaulted ceiling, six private offices, support-staff area, conference room, kitchen and restrooms," says Grosvenor. The large skylight on the second floor contains LED lights that can be configured to replicate various sky scenarios, from cloudy to partly cloudy to clear blue. The elegant cage elevator was also quite a project, he adds. "It is actually an elevator within an elevator. It's a two-story lift encased in a cage design that we created based on turn-of-the-century elevators."

The architects drew inspiration from Daniel Burnham's 19th-century buildings in Chicago to design the cage elevator. It is actually a two-story lift encased in the custom wrought iron cage elevator. *Ben Jacobsen*

"Bellevue Avenue has always been a pedestrian- friendly street and the new museum is a welcomed addition to the block that also is home to the International Tennis Hall of Fame," Grosvenor explains. "We worked closely with a lighting designer to up-light the building from the sidewalk, as well as light the building from other angles. When you walk past the building at night, it sparkles like a jewel box."

The \$20-million project was completed on schedule and the rehabilitated Audrain Building once again graces a historic street in Newport, RI.

Key Suppliers

General Contractor: Parker Construction, Rumford, RI



Terra-Cotta Ornament: [Boston Valley Terra Cotta](#), Orchard Park, NY