

Rehabbing buildings helps preserve Greenville's history

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Historic preservation has six basic "R's" — restore, renovate, repair, rehabilitate, revitalize.

They will be celebrated Thursday when the Greenville Association of Realtors honors the building owners who have made a commitment to Greenville's future by investing money and imagination in its past.

Two winners, one commercial, the other residential, will win Revitalization Awards, but all 12 of the nominated properties deserve recognition for their contributions to their neighborhoods and preserving Greenville's buildings.

Among this year's entries are two former gas stations, renovated 1950s commercial buildings, a former daycare center, restaurants in downtown Greer and Greenville, a modest cottage converted to a snazzy beauty salon, and residences on Fountain Inn's Main Street, along a tucked-away Eastside road, and in the Earle Street Historic District.

Although Meadors Sandwich Shop on Court Square and Gerard's Restaurant on Poinsett Street in Greer were "naturals," with prime locations, century-old buildings, and obvious promise, most of the others took real perception, hard work, and design skill for their possibilities to be realized.

The most important criterion for the Revitalization Awards was each renovation's potential for revitalizing the nearby area, although judges also considered each structure's before and after appearance, including exterior appearance as well as interior detailing.

Perhaps the most daring project is owner Gene Berger's conversion of a particularly unsightly former gas station at the corner of West Stone Avenue and North Main Street. The new Horizon Records and its adjacent cafe have adapted the gas station structure with few changes, but the interior is extraordinary.

Old wooden planks, painstakingly refinished, make a stunning floor; bold colors and dozens of imaginative design details combine to create a functional and lively music shop. It may well spark further renovations on a busy commercial street that is gradually being upgraded.

Like most of this year's revitalization award nominees, the building is not "historic." It is was an undistinguished Amoco service station built in the 1950s, a period noted for its remarkable number of unmemorable cookie-cutter "modern" buildings.

Another 1950s rehabilitation, although one substantially more understated than Horizon Records' new home, is the conversion of a drab former Life of Georgia agency in the 800 block of Pendleton Street. Co-owners Aerie Engineering and Granite Properties designed and executed a relatively inexpensive but sparkingly contemporary interior for the once tired one-story building set at an angle to the street.

They only repaired, washed, and repainted the facade, but the brand new interior plays with the building's diagonal shape to emphasize and echo the exterior slant in offices and a large engineering workroom. Imaginative lighting and design elements have updated a staid and frayed old office.

The thoroughly renovated BSA office building on Antrim Drive is another example of a rehabilitated '50s commercial structure. Although the totally reworked interior has been recrafted to create first-class office

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space, it's the outside — with its careful landscaping (a charming rear patio with trees and shrubs makes a particularly pleasant spot for small gatherings and break time) — as well as a whole new front facade concept that thoroughly improves the entire short street off Pleasantburg Drive.

A final '50s rehab (the period is clearly ripe for creative development), a small bungalow on Eastlan Drive, a modest street just off Laurens Road near Antrim Drive, has become Tracy's Final Touch, a full-service beauty salon in a once totally residential neighborhood. A lovely hidden patio, plants (both artificial and real), and imaginative ceiling treatments welcome patrons.

The residential nominees varied far more in age and style than the commercial entries. A cozy turn-of-the-century cottage in the 400 block of Fountain Inn's Main Street was more than doubled in size, with a stunning extension to the rear to create a modern kitchen, children's bedrooms and play rooms, and a second-floor master suite. Old interior details — including coal-burning fireplaces and stained glass — were saved in its re-creation as a contemporary home for a large family.

The most extraordinary element of the renovation was that the front facade was unchanged; from the street, the home still looks like the modest cottage it once was.

An architect-designed "modern" split-level home built in the 1960s on Oakway Circle, a shaded suburban street on the Eastside, had become a dilapidated eyesore when its new owner rescued it from total ruin. The before and after pictures told the story. Collapsing floors, unstable walls, a once pleasant small deck overgrown with weeds — all were repaired, renewed, and renovated with an artistic eye for entertaining. With a new spacious dining room overlooking a sunken living room, a comfortable and handsome den, and a heavily wooded backyard retreat and elegant deck (either an inspired landscape architect or a remarkably creative gardener has been at work), the house welcomes guests.

A talented architect must also have had a hand in renovating a colonial revival home from the 1940s on East Earle Street off North Main Street. Judges gaped at the pictures of the original residence. It had been vacant for a number of years, had generations of dowdy wallpaper and paint peeling from the walls, an awkward layout, and suffered from neglect both outside and in.

Paint, repairs, and hours of hard labor renewed the home's street front, but it took an architect to extend the house, create a bright and airy kitchen, remove a wall to make a sun room, and replace a utilitarian but ugly rear staircase (the upstairs was once rented out) with a new one to match the handsome one in the front hall.

All of the nominees share three attributes: They have reclaimed and updated an older building with hard work, imagination, and love. Our building heritage is not just 19th century downtown shops and columned mansions; it also lives in small streets, neglected properties, and even, amazingly, in buildings from the 1950s