



REVIVING THE PAST

BY TIFFANY HORTON, HORTON DESIGN STUDIOS
PHOTOS BY MATT CORNELIUS

The newly renovated Potter & Marks Law Firm building has been a part of Texarkana's history since the early 1900s.

From the research Josh Potter has done, he learned that his family's ties to the building date back to the 1940s or 1950s when his grandmother worked for a business located in the building. In 1997, his father, Charles Potter, bought the building along with his law partners at the time and set up an office for the Arnold and Arnold law firm. This later became the Potter Law Firm, and today, his sons, Josh and Jake Potter, have taken on partner Eric Marks to create the Potter & Marks Law Firm. For these three local attorneys, the opportunity to renew their existing building and assist with revitalizing downtown was the obvious answer to addressing a need for more space. "We all love the downtown buildings. Plus, the Bi-State is right there



and the courthouse. The federal courthouse is right out our back door. Miller County courthouse is down the street, and even the Juvenile courthouse is nearby." Josh continued, "We've got everything we need almost within walking distance. And we knew the potential of this building, that half of it was unused, and we already had an elevator, which a lot of the buildings downtown don't, and even though it wasn't working, it had until a couple of years ago." Discussion of the remodel started about three years ago. The original floor plan design was conceived while Josh and Eric were hanging out one evening after work and, like many great ideas, sketched on a napkin. They began their renovation with the help of local draftsman Stephanie

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Thompson and local contractor Jason Eppinette. "We had looked at a few new buildings, but this just has so much character, and we wanted to bring that out," Josh said. "Jason Eppinette did a great job of doing that for us." The layout of the bottom floor stayed the same, primarily receiving new finishes such as paint and flooring. The exterior underwent a complete facelift, and the upstairs, which had previously been used as storage, was also transformed.

Outside, the 1990s facade was removed, exposing the original brick exterior and three large second-story windows. They added a stucco coating to the walls leading to the front entrance, stained beadboard to the ceiling, and sleek lighting for emphasis. The exterior brick was painted a dark gray to differentiate the building from its neighbors while hiding damage left from the faux facade and highlighting the historical elements of the structure. Another element indicative of many of the original downtown buildings, they also worked their business name into the stained concrete just outside the entrance.

Upstairs, construction started with removing every non-load-bearing interior wall. It is clear that importance was placed on maintaining the historical integrity of every element of the space. For starters, they chose to expose the old brick and embrace each one's uniqueness. They were also able to restore the original hardwood floors without having to outsource any new planks by strategically pulling wood from areas where the hardwoods would be covered with cabinetry or where another type of flooring was needed for the purpose of that particular space and using those boards to replace damaged pieces. Eppinette was able to cleverly conceal unsightly mechanical pieces with period-looking cabinetry and molding details. The floor plan design allowed for a hallway leading to a large, new conference room with offices along one side and a library, complete with a library ladder, down the other side. They have since filled the bookcases with law books, some of which date over 300 years. "This is the set that I inherited," Eric explained. "This book is from 1842, and you can see the reporter was Albert Pike. In another book, we found a note from 1898." Even though information is gathered

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and stored electronically now, they have all enjoyed going through the collection. Josh added, "In one of the Supreme Court Reporter books was an old business card for an attorney out of Shreveport that only had a three-digit phone number. Then the other day, a 1958 George Washington five-cent stamp fell out of a book downstairs." For the required roof access, they chose to bring in a metal ship's ladder. Not only does the metal feel historically appropriate, but the openness allowed them to maintain unobstructed views out their back windows, which include the Grimm Hotel and the Federal Courthouse.

While much thought was clearly given to the historical details, it is apparent that the same kind of intentionality was given to modern features as well. One very ingenious touch was a locker area complete with a hanging steam cabinet perfect for attorneys as their days often take them from casual to courtroom-ready in only a matter of hours. The second and most unexpected element

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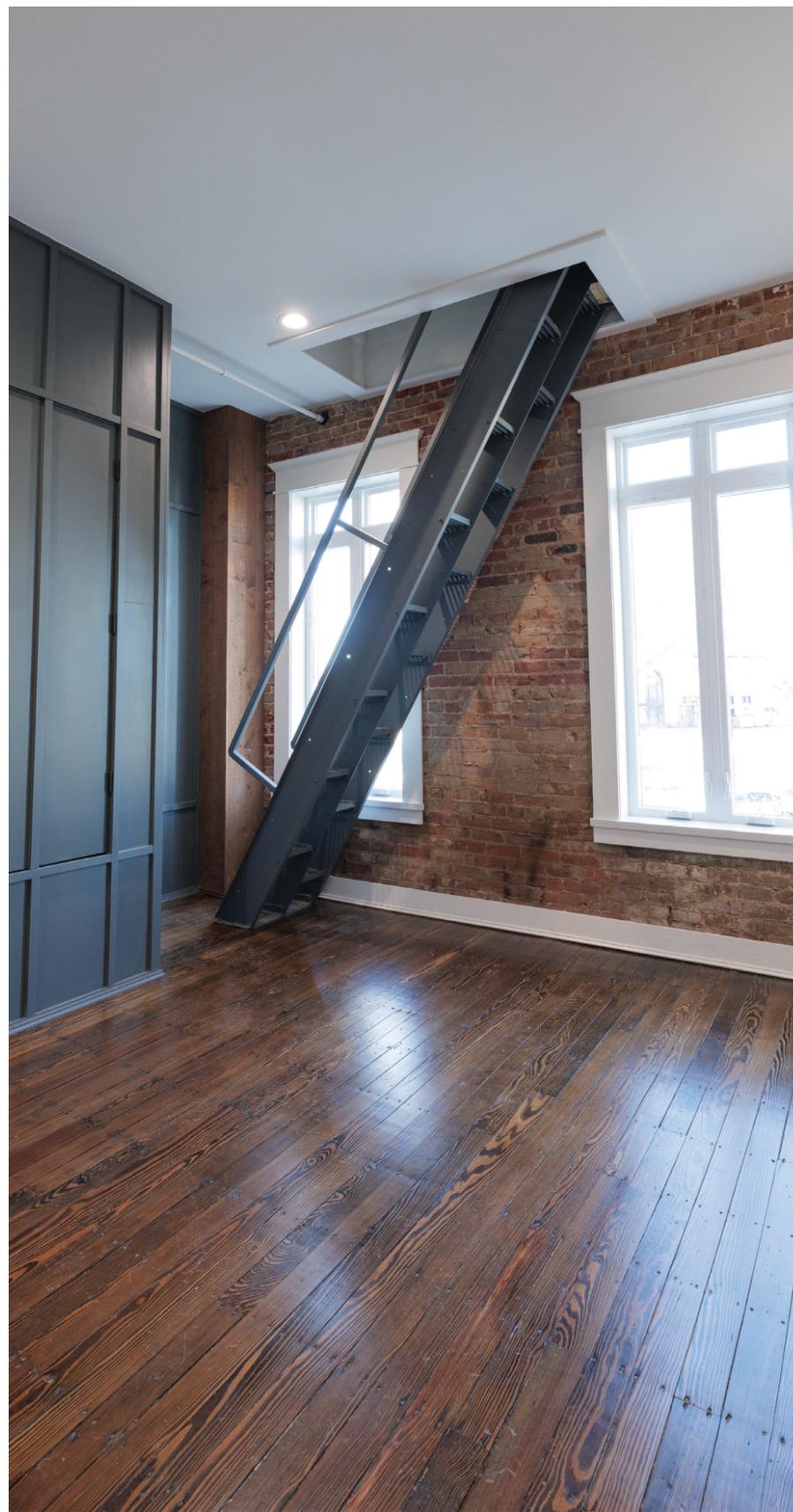
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is a secret attorney breakroom hidden perfectly by a set of sliding bookcases. There is something so appropriate about the bar-like design as if it were a nod to the days of prohibition. But it's much more than a bar; it's a place for the partners to grab a coffee, catch up on the news, or even take a brain break during a stressful day. The space has been laid out in a manner that allows them to easily entertain clients or host a staff Christmas party. They chose to finish this area in a way that is elegant and refined but not too serious. One of the highlights of the room is a custom-made arcade game. It may look like an original piece, but they had *My Cousin Vinny* images put on the outside, and it has been programmed to house a variety of games organized by the console type on which they would have originally been played. "It has every single game from our childhood, if you grew up in the 1980s or 1990s. It has arcade games plus every system from that era with every game uploaded to it," explained Eric.

It is clear how much care and attention to detail has gone into revitalizing this space in a way that strikes a balance between its historical roots and its modern-day use. This timeless investment will inspire others to see all the potential downtown Texarkana has to offer. ①

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