



LEFT TO RIGHT: Behind the brick facade of Corinth's 511 and 513 Cruise Street are loft residences that now have a SoHo and TriBeCa feel. Ole Miss Alumnus Barry Dixon designed the interior spaces of Griffith Place.

textures of time

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Corinth's native son Lanny Griffith transforms downtown buildings.

Downtown Corinth is marking the debut of its most ambitious restoration project yet, as a pair of abandoned late 19th century buildings take on vibrant new life.

Debuting at a dedication event in November, the adjoining buildings at 511 and 513 Cruise Street have been transformed in a five-year effort by Susan and Lanny Griffith through their development company, Cross City Properties.

"Corinth is a very dynamic city and has done a good job of preserving the cultural resources that were already here," says Lanny Griffith, a Corinth native and founder of the Barbour Griffith & Rogers lobbying firm, alongside current Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour.

"We want to do more by taking these historic buildings, bringing them to life, and finding modern uses for them while at the same time protecting their historic character."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The loft space was designed with movable drapery "walls" and sliding panels to create rooms. Soft, natural colors were utilized throughout. Dixon left the interior walls of the structure just as they were found. A sealant was placed over the walls to preserve their patina.





That was the charge Griffith offered to New Orleans architect and preservation specialist Dennis Brady.

"I was very enthused about the idea of developing residential space above commercial and retail," Brady says. "When you have a business going on below and an apartment above, it allows the downtown area to extend its lifecycle to the after-work hours. In Corinth, you see people walking the streets downtown and you know that's already happening."

The rebirth and restoration of Corinth's downtown was jump-started nearly two decades ago, with a movement to have 18 local sites placed on the registry of National Historic Landmarks. Built between 1875-1880, the two buildings Griffith has restored once housed a grain-and-feed business.

In upper floors, once used for inventory storage, the buildings told their stories through stenciled numbers, initials, and dates, imprinted on the plaster covering the brick walls. These historic details were preserved as part of the vision of interior designer Barry Dixon, who simply coated the raw walls with sealant.

"I think there is an art to the patina that history grants an old structure like this," the designer says. "I didn't want to just trowel over that. I wanted to celebrate it."

Based in Virginia, the University of Mississippi alumnus has created his share of industrial-modern lofts in upscale Manhattan neighborhoods like SoHo and TriBeCa. But what he finds surprising are the similar spaces in small towns all over the country — which have potential to achieve the same effect.

In the case of Griffith's project, the upper floors have been transformed from rough storage areas into spacious residential lofts, each about 2,500 square feet. Beneath soaring ceilings and skylights, the two-bedroom, two-and-a-half bath layouts feature sleek kitchens and modern bathrooms.

An open living space is situated at the front of each residence, taking advantage of the large street-facing windows which were carefully restored during the construction process.

Dixon envisioned the living spaces being defined and redefined by the use of fabric panels hung from custom pipe-and-rod systems.

"We used them for wall-hung panels done in a wonderful, textured horsehair-linen weave," he says. "It's a sheer effect but has a coarser, burlap sensibility to it. These become walls or can open to create one large space."

Outside, Brady configured access to the upstairs residences via the rear alleyway, since the second floors had previously been accessed only by interior stairways.

"There was no real opportunity to penetrate the front wall — the buildings were not designed for that," he says. "But you could easily clean up the alleyway and allow a second entrance, reanimating the backs of the buildings."

That alleyway was given the name Griffith Place by Corinth Mayor Jerry Latch as part of the November dedication event. The Corinth Preservation Commission also bestowed upon Griffith its highest honor for historic restoration, the Corinthian Column Award.

"It means so much to a small town to have a favorite son and family come back and share their successes," Latch said. ■