

SANDTOWN FURNITURE HEADQUARTERS

1226 WICOMICO STREET, BALTIMORE, MD

Project Overview

This project began with Sandtown Furniture's vision to build their forever-home in an existing warehouse in the industrial Pigtown neighborhood of Baltimore. The 30,400 SF warehouse originally served as the generator house for Chesapeake Gas Company, then became a manufacturing warehouse for gas ranges, and is now the home of custom furniture artisans. The ultimate programmatic goal of the project was to create an inspired and sacred space for making beautiful objects, able to also transform into an event space that functions as a furniture showroom, a gallery, and even a wedding venue.

Completeness

The buildout of Sandtown HQ2 was an ambitious project scale on a relatively lean budget – and required creativity and commitment to reach completion. "There is no Phase 2" was the spirit; the project team was committed to building the dream without compromise. It was a real challenge, but on Oct 27, 2022 the project got its U&O and the Sandtown team was fully operational by Jan 2023.

The project was supported by loans and grants from BDC and DHCD of Maryland. BGE also supported the project. Its location in an Opportunity Zone, Enterprise Zone and EZ Focus Area meant the project could access low-interest loans, as well as grants

dedicated for the renovation of vacant buildings. These City and State programs made the project possible, but the creativity of the project team has made it thrive.

In the early design stages, the project needed to create an additional revenue stream to make the project financials work. Meanwhile, the project team was exploring ways to invite a wider community & audience to experience this beautiful space. That exercise led to an idea: to use the space as an event venue when the woodshop was closed, one that could host private events and public events, allowing Sandtown HQ2 to become a backdrop for fostering community.



A Sense of Place and Quality

Over the years, the existing building served many industrial purposes, but for the last 20+ years it sat unused. When Sandtown found it in 2020, it was a magnificent shell in a state of total disrepair.

The vision was to connect it back to its industrial heritage – as a state-of-the-art woodworking facility, producing the highest quality custom wood tables. More than that though, the vision was for the space to be a source of constant design inspiration.

Sandtown's mission is to salvage wood from old Baltimore trees and old Baltimore buildings, and to give that wood a second life through beautiful design & craftsmanship. Whenever possible, Sandtown preserves the original character and imperfection – a nod to the materials' history. A similar approach was applied to the building.



The many lives of the building has resulted in a beautiful tapestry of textures. Its renovation was therefore an exercise of restraint and thoughtful intervention in order to let these layers of history play a meaningful architectural role. With its clerestory windows and fast openness, there was a clear analogous relationship between the architecture of the existing warehouse and the architecture of a church. The church archetype therefore served as an important inspiration in pursuit of designing a sacred space for making.

Entering through a large steel door and into a dark clad vestibule, the user is lead up a ramp, and moves from the compression of the vestibule to the release of the light filled showroom, mirroring one's procession from a church vestibule into the narthex. A large glass wall separates the woodshop from the gallery and serves as a secondary threshold condition as one moves into the workshop. The machinery, located in the "nave" of the building, is aligned along the main axis, flanked by aisles and workstations on each side. At the crossing is access to auxiliary spaces, including the staff lounge and courtyard which serve as an important space for rest. The existing overhead structure of the courtyard is exposed to create a trellis condition and a garage door was added to create an uninhibited connection with the courtyard, allowing the two spaces to become one for events

Sustainability

The Building:

With Sandtown HQ2, the project took a 137 year old, 32k sq ft, dilapidated building in the heart of old industrial Baltimore – and gave it purpose again. The adaptive reuse project maintained

the existing footprint and preserved almost all of the original building. Modifications to the original building were very minor, and even those were done thoughtfully. Glass blocks were preserved and reused in other window openings, bricks were saved and repurposed. This design approach both minimized the environmental footprint, and preserved the history & character of the original building.

The Operation:

The City of Baltimore is a national model for how cities should manage their wood waste – and Sandtown is a key player in that ecosystem. The HQ2 facility – in addition to their South Baltimore sawmill operation – brings their entire product supply chain inside Baltimore City limits.

The City of Baltimore Forestry Division takes down trees for a variety of reasons....trees that had to come down. Through the City's innovative Camp Small program – companies like Sandtown are able to purchase the trees. Rather than becoming waste – the wood is put to its "best and highest use" - in this case, wood furniture. Sandtown has created an entire supply chain inside of Baltimore City limits, and employs almost exclusively city residents. The operation mills the salvaged logs to furniture-grade lumber, dries the wood through air-drying and kiln-drying techniques, and crafts that kiln-dried salvaged wood into finished furniture. Entirely within the City of Baltimore.

Sandtown services a very local market – almost entirely Baltimore, DC and VA – thus keeping the transportation and logistics footprint at a minimum also. Prior to HQ2, several key parts of this supply chain required trips to Pennsylvania to be completed, but it's now all done right here in Baltimore.



Visionary and Emulation

The conventional model for a product company's physical footprint often separates the production from the retail, privileging the customer's experience over the employee's. "There is no back of house" was the guiding design principle. There aren't separate facilities for customers & employees – just one for both to share. The consideration & financial investment made into the gallery/showroom was equal to the production space. The only thing that separates the two is a full-height, full-width, full-transparency glass wall. The result is a space that's wonderful to visit as a customer, and equally as special to work in as a member of the Sandtown team. The result is a customer that feels deeply connected to the company they're buying from, and a production team that feels valued, prioritized, and connected to the recipient of their hard work.



A Need

Sandtown HQ2 is in what they call "the heart of a budding salvage district". Second Chance, Brick & Board & Housewerks are all within a short walk. These neighboring companies are all in the business of salvaging Baltimore history and making it special again – and Sandtown is proud to be part of this community and movement.

Sandtown Furniture's new home has allowed the shop to increase its production by 70% working with the same team during the same hours. But the building goes beyond serving their own production needs. While Sandtown Furniture headquarters primarily functions as a woodshop, the intentional and meaningful arrangement of program becomes a celebratory backdrop, allowing the building to continue its history of taking on many uses by also operating as an event venue.

The Butterfly Room – the name for the event space, a reference to a woodworking technique called a butterfly joint – was born. The team believed that residents of Baltimore would be drawn to just how raw & authentic this old building was – and would want to venture to a lesser known pocket of town.

The team was not wrong! In the first 6 months of 2023, The Butterfly Room has hosted dozens of photoshoots, a pop-up yoga practice, a Creative Mornings breakfast, a vintage Bmore Flea market, countless wedding photoshoots and 2 weddings – the first of 25 (!) scheduled through 2024. The project made a bet that Baltimore loves Baltimore – and it paid off. This secondary use has successfully delivered the needed revenue stream (most

events mentioned above use the space free of charge) – and more importantly created a deeper connection between the company and the community – and a hub of community activity in South Baltimore.

Project Completion Date:
January 2023

Project Address:
1226 Wicomico St,
Baltimore, MD 21230

Project County:
Baltimore City

Construction Cost:
\$1,400,000

Project Size in Square Feet:
30,400 sqft

Project Owner:
Sandtown Furniture Co.
Will Phillips
James Battaglia

Applicant:
Kuo Pao Lian
1916 Fleet St.
Baltimore, MD 21231
443.928.1659
kuopao@piklstudio.com

Architect / Designer:
PI.KL Studio
Kuo Pao Lian
Pavlina Ilieva
Courtney Richeson
Donna Ryu

General Contractor:
Commercial Interior
Construction

Civil Engineer:
MK Consulting Engineers
Anthony Cortea Jr.

Structural Engineer:
Skarda & Associates
Eric Alwine

MEP Engineer:
Thomas Foulkes

Photographer:
Steven Norris

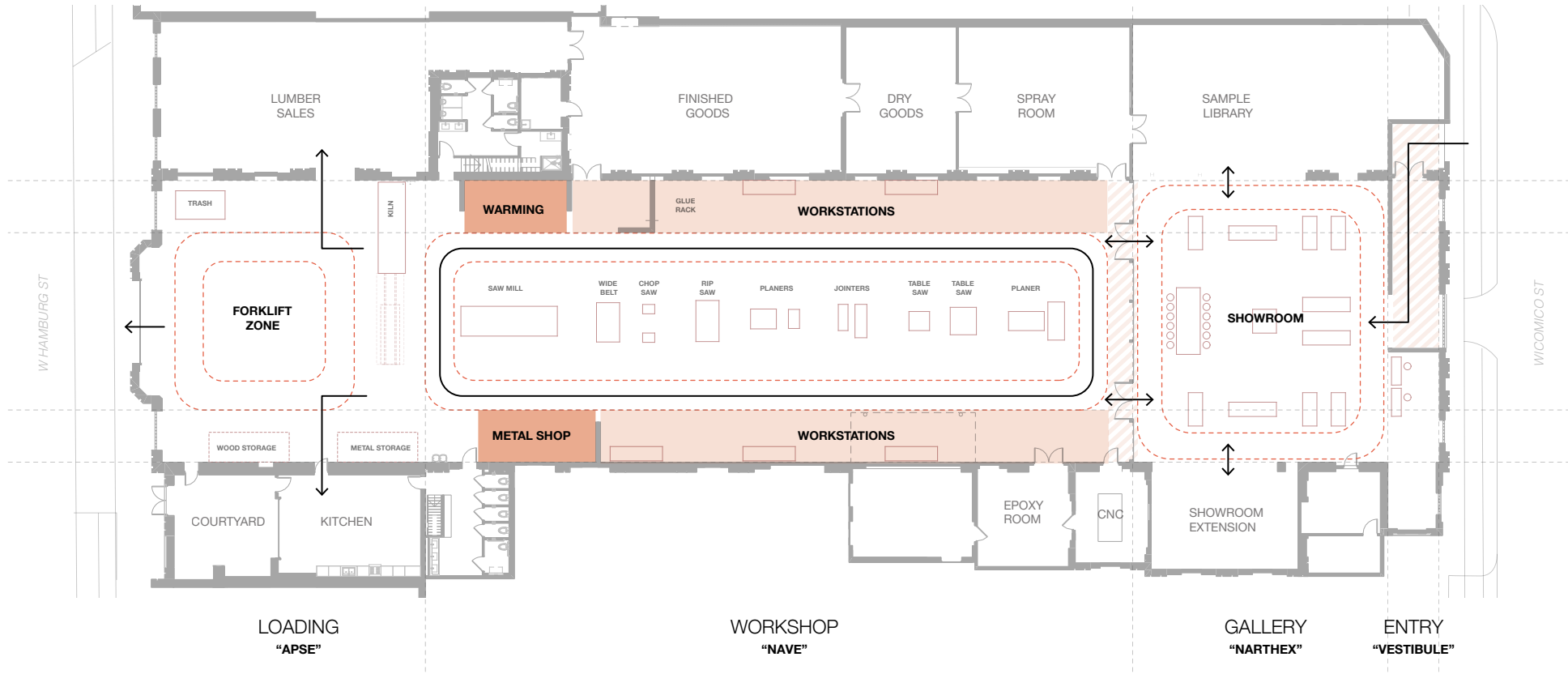
SANDTOWN
FURNITURE CO. 1226 WICOMICO

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Existing Conditions

The warehouse originally served as the generator house for Chesapeake Gas Company, then became a manufacturing warehouse for gas ranges, and is now the home of custom furniture artisans.



Floor Plan

With its clerestory windows and fast openness, there was a clear analogous relationship between the architecture of the existing warehouse and the architecture of a church. The church archetype therefore served as an important inspiration in pursuit of designing a sacred space for making.



Context

The project is located in the industrial Pigtown neighborhood of Baltimore.



Vestibule

Entering through a large steel door and into a dark clad vestibule, the user is lead up a ramp, and moves from the compression of the vestibule to the release of the light filled showroom, mirroring one's procession from a church vestibule into the narthex.

Narthex

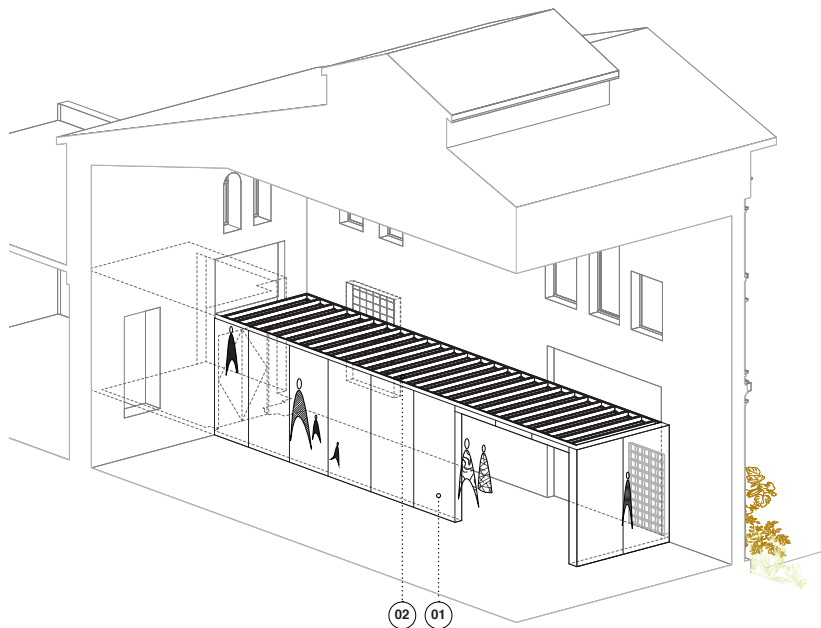
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Procession

The transition from vestibule to showroom is the first threshold condition as one begins their procession through the warehouse.





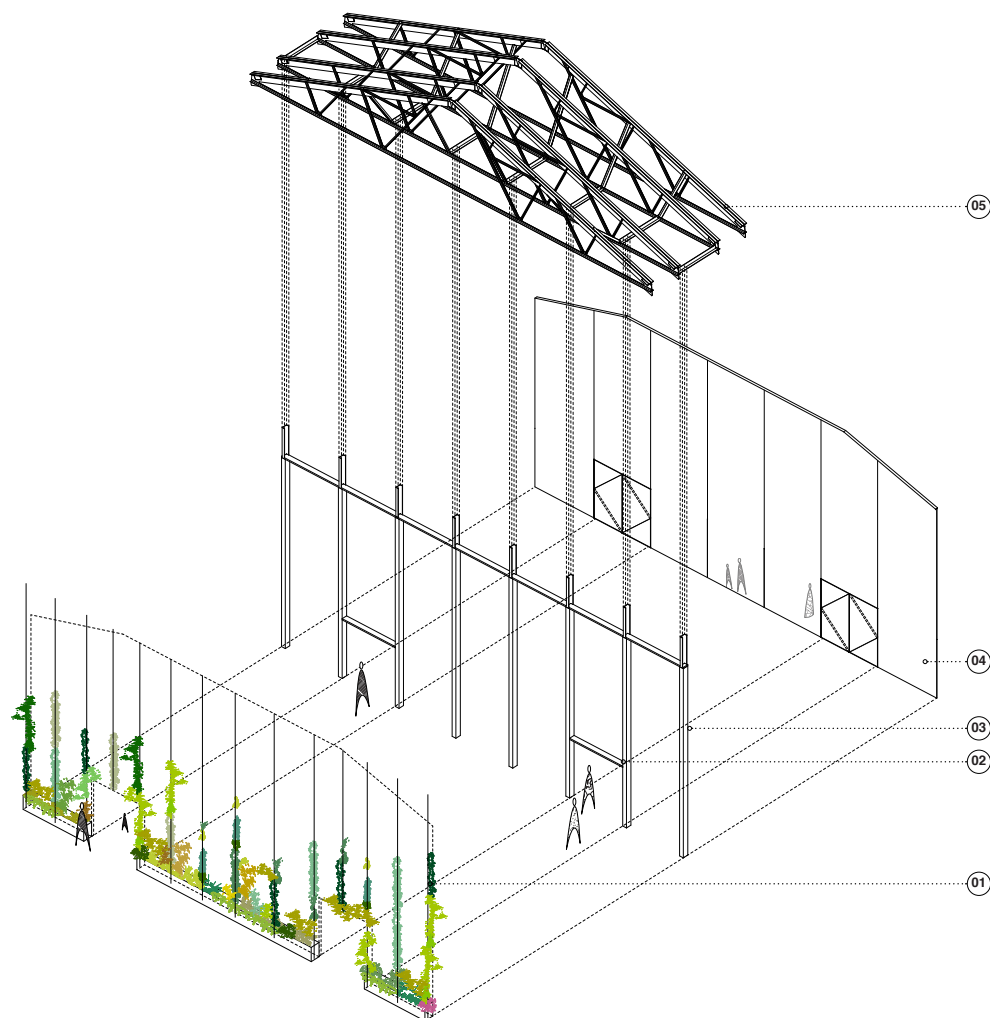
Entry Vestibule Axon Study
01. Hot-Rolled Steel Panels
02. Structural Steel Members



Entry Vestibule Perspective Study

A Series of Thresholds

The vestibule serves as the first threshold condition. The glass wall that separates the woodshop from the gallery serves as the second threshold condition, creating another moment of compression and release while maintaining visibility into both the shop and the showroom.

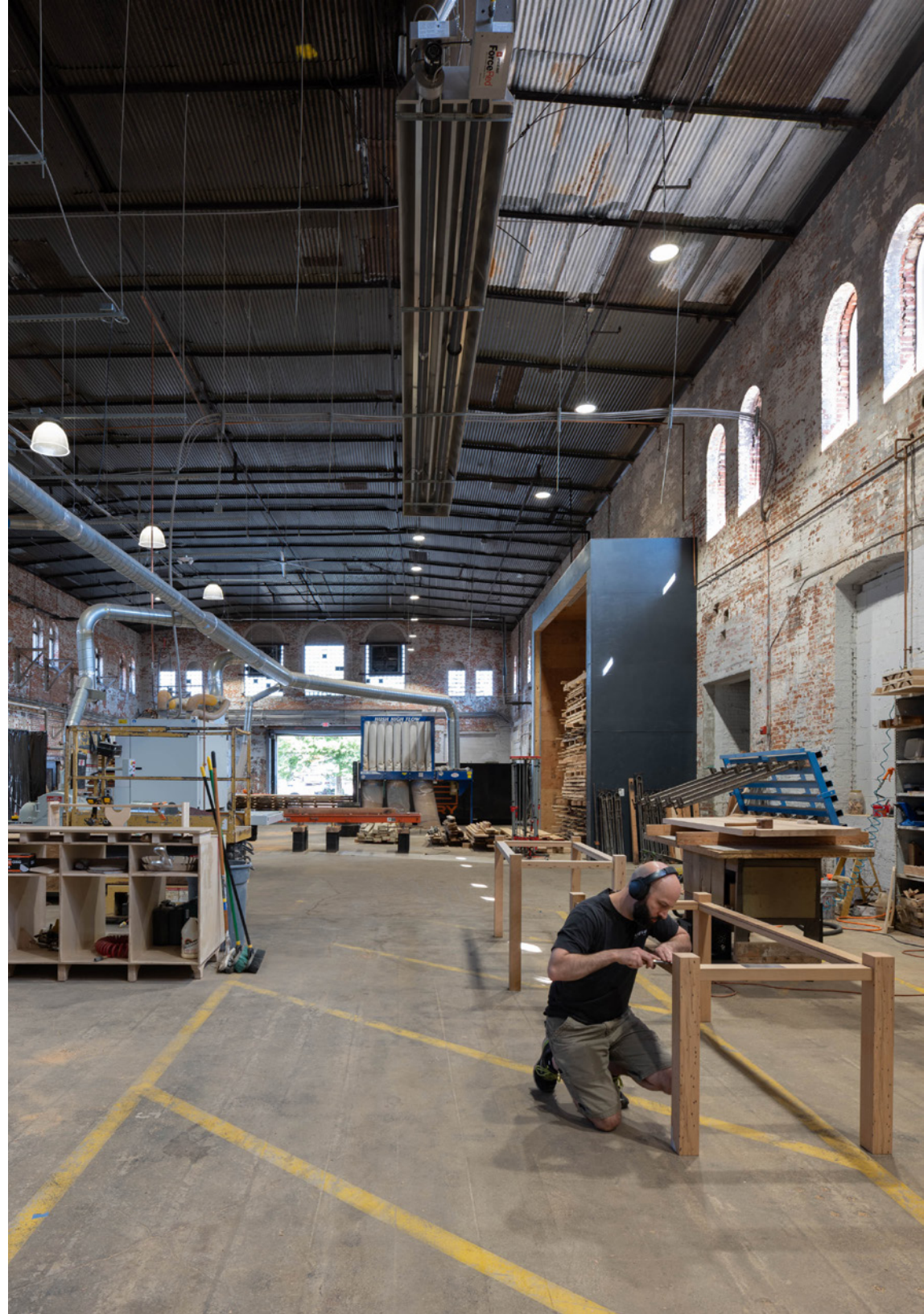


Glass Wall Exploded Axon Study
01. Vertical Vegetation on Tensile Wire
02. Horizontal Steel Frame
03. Vertical Steel Frame
04. Tempered Glass
05. Existing Structural Truss

Nave

The machinery, located in the "nave" of the building, is aligned along the main axis, flanked by aisles and workstations on each side.





A Sacred Space for Making

The ultimate programmatic goal of the project was to create an inspired and sacred space for making beautiful objects.



Courtyard

At the crossing is access to auxiliary spaces, including the staff lounge and courtyard which serve as an important space for rest. The existing overhead structure of the courtyard is exposed to create a trellis condition and a garage door was added to create an uninhibited connection with the courtyard, allowing the two spaces to become one for events



A Sacred Space for Making

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Transformation: Sandtown Furniture as a Gallery

While Sandtown Furniture headquarters primarily functions as a woodshop, the intentional and meaningful arrangement of program becomes a celebratory backdrop, allowing the building to continue its history of taking on many uses.



Sandtown Furniture as a Woodshop

Sandtown Furniture's new home has allowed the shop to increase its production by 70% working with the same team during the same hours.



Sandtown Furniture as an Event Space

The Butterfly Room – the name for the event space, a reference to a woodworking technique called a butterfly joint – was born. The team believed that residents of Baltimore would be drawn to just how raw & authentic this old building was – and would want to venture to a lesser known pocket of town.



Photograph:
Creative Mornings Baltimore



Photograph:
Urban Row Photography



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Photograph:
Creative Mornings Baltimore



Photograph:
Sarah James Photography