

BACKSTAGE

110 East 7th Avenue

Stillwater, Oklahoma

Backstage is an event space that invites you to wonder about the past, draw inspiration for the present, and think creatively about the future. Through the integration of art, architecture and craftsmanship, Backstage represents 120 years of shared history and creates a context to consider what's next.

When my first software company (Teubner & Associates) needed additional office space in the early 1990's, I thought "What better way to illustrate what we do, or how we do it, than by renovating a collection of vintage buildings for our own use?" Guided by that thought (and little more) we embarked on the redevelopment of this corner of Stillwater. My vision was for the buildings to be a tangible expression of what we did in the intangible world of software -- which is all about integration.

"Integration" is a word that has numerous meanings and even more connotations (some uncomfortable). For a few of us, it's a descriptive term that simply denotes a sector of the technology business. Some of us on the software side of this business develop products that allow older, more established computer systems to communicate with new and emerging technology. If we do our job well no one knows we exist: an ATM card works; a prescription is filled, a truck is built; a car is leased. Our specialty is respecting both the old and the new – and making them work together for greater benefit.



This building began life as a dry goods store, with the back of the building serving as the arrival point of desperately needed supplies for the settlers and entrepreneurs of the 1890's. I imagine it as physically uncomfortable and filled with the noise and raw expressions of the early west. After a terrible fire, the building was rebuilt as a theatre for vaudeville, complete with an organ (where the catering entrance is today). As vaudeville gave way to cinema, the theatre went through numerous renovations to keep up with technology and customer preferences. Ultimately the building was abandoned in favor of a modern movie complex north of town. When we took possession in the 1990's, the building had a sloped floor, no seats and a broken popcorn machine. After extensive renovation, it was reborn as professional office space.

During the hey-day of Teubner & Associates, the Backstage area was used for light industrial manufacturing. UPS and FedEx would deliver PCs on the loading dock one day and pick them up the next day outfitted with our software (and destined for companies all over the world). In many respects, Backstage was already returning to its roots as a space where entrepreneurs received raw materials, added value and shipped their wares (but this time with air conditioning). For most of the last decade we used the space for storage. But its potential was not forgotten.

Since acquiring them, the buildings on this corner have been a context for craftsmanship and a laboratory to experiment with new ideas (whether virtual or physical). In the software business we always integrate something existing with something emerging. Making them work in harmony is our goal. It is this integration mindset that has guided the design of Backstage. Modern LED lighting has transformed a ceiling, comprised of basic materials like corrugated tin and electrical conduits, into something expressive and dynamic. The end result would not have been possible without the craftsmanship of electricians 16 years ago. But it also required new technology, and equally skilled craftsmen, to create something very special.

The art was curated to convey history and capture the imagination. The Warhol screen-prints remind us of the strong personalities who seasoned Oklahoma's rich history. Annie Oakley performed here; General Custer fought here; the Trail of Tears ended here; Geronimo died here; Teddy Roosevelt signed our state into existence. They knew our land when this building was a dry goods store and a vaudeville theatre. If you look behind the Warhols, you'll see restored bricks from that by-gone era. But presenting the facts or faces of history doesn't convey the full picture. Wendy Salin's figurative bronzes ("Unseen Forces") fill the gap by expressing the range of emotions experienced in this space over the past century – whether by early settlers or modern entrepreneurs.



While steeped in history, Backstage is a space that encourages new thoughts, new perspectives and new plans. I hope it will help people reimagine our city, state and region. I also hope it provokes questions, perhaps springing from a sense of disorientation: "Where am I?" "What is this place?" "How did this happen?" Many different types of gatherings will occur in this space -- business meetings, philanthropic and musical events, art openings, receptions and private dining -- both serious and fun. But whatever their nature, I hope the venue causes those in attendance to wonder about our past, draw inspiration for the present, and think creatively about our future.

Russ Teubner
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