

# RESTORING CITY LANDMARKS

Reworking Metairie Country Club and One Shell Square | By Diane Calabrese

Forces of nature come in two forms, the dramatic and memorable, and the quiet and almost subtle. A storm like Hurricane Katrina destroys buildings and lives in an instant. But cumulative changes wrought by ordinary wind, rain, and sun also affect structures, as do the moisture and dirt people bring inside on their shoes and clothes.

Keeping pace with structural rehabilitation projects and restoring buildings damaged by immediate or gradual natural events is all in a day's work for The McDonnell Group, which handles acute damage, as well as restoration, repairs, updates, and new construction.

Two current projects illustrate the breadth of McDonnell's services. One

is a design-build project at the Metairie Country Club in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana. The other is a tenant improvement job at One Shell Square in downtown New Orleans.

**No denim is the rule** at the Metairie Country Club, which opened in 1924. Since then, as the club expanded it covered over much of the original interior design and built new space. Hurricane Katrina seriously damaged the club. Restoration has required repairing and correcting earlier, utilitarian add-ons to re-expose the original grandeur of the building.

Budget for the country club project is \$15 million. Staying within this budget is perhaps the biggest challenge, said The McDonnell Group Project Man-

ager Marty Scheve, who is working closely with Mathes Brierre Architects to produce visually pleasing and cost-effective results. "To meet the budget, we took the original drawings that were shown to the members and priced from that set of drawings," Scheve said. "We also priced up the latest drawings from the architect."

One way to stretch the budget for a restoration and renovation project is to make good use of existing structures, where possible. Not all structures are sound enough to retain, however. For this project, some of the existing foundation below the ballroom area may qualify for continued service, but only if a structural engineer passes it upon inspection. Ongoing Phase One construction



Restoring the original 1924 architectural character, updating recreational and social spaces, and rebuilding after serious damage from Hurricane Katrina are key objectives of The McDonnell Group's work at the Metairie Country Club in suburban New Orleans. Keen attention to the project budget is another.

includes a new ballroom, kitchen, formal dining area, adult dining room, lounge, and second floor offices. The McDonnell Group completed six tennis courts in mid-November 2007. By April 2008, a new lap pool and kids' pool will be in place.

Scheve said Phase One is scheduled for completion in October 2008. The project covers 47,402 square feet. Separate bidding will award work on planned fitness center additions and a new pro shop. The McDonnell Group's work at Metairie Country Club is restoring the elegance of the original 1920s structure, unifying the architectural design, and revitalizing recreational areas in the venerable club.

**Shell renewed its lease.** In July 2006, MetLife Real Estate Investments and Shell Oil Co. announced Shell's continuing occupancy at One Shell Square. Shell, which occupies 656,000 square feet of the landmark tower in downtown New Orleans, renewed its lease for 10 years. Designed by Skidmore, Owings



The McDonnell Group is remodeling 16 floors of One Shell Square (far right). The landmark tower was built in 1972 in downtown New Orleans, where Shell Oil Co. has a longstanding community presence. The 25-month, \$22 million project is revitalizing 335,000 square feet on a compressed timeline.

& Merrill and originally developed by Hines, the building went up in 1972. The 51-story tower was the tallest building in Louisiana for many years.

At 697 feet, One Shell Square glitters on the New Orleans skyline as it reflects light from its Italian travertine (limestone) and bronze glass exterior. The McDonnell Group was the successful bidder to renovate 16 floors of the building for Shell in a \$22-million project that began in November 2007. The work is scheduled for completion by December 2009.

The total area being renovated is about 335,000 square feet, said Andrew Silva, a Project Manager for The McDonnell Group. DMJM Rottet is the architect and EDA Engineering is the project engineer for the renovation. Shell wants the renovation to improve interdepartmental efficiency and uniformity between Shell offices in New Orleans and Houston. The renovation also includes updated interior finishes and renewed architectural casework, carpets, and paint.

"Shell has several safety programs that must be adhered to throughout the project," Silva said. With 45 days allotted as the average turnaround time for each floor, the schedule is compressed. A freight elevator shared with other con-

tractors and delivery companies makes renovating One Shell Square a little more challenging still, Silva said. The McDonnell Group coordinates deliveries after hours or in the early morning to get the job done and prevent possible bottlenecks.

Although the project has many difficult aspects, The McDonnell Group team takes them in stride. "The McDonnell Group is confronting these challenges by conducting a weekly meeting with Shell's project manager," Silva said. "This allows us to resolve problems immediately when they arise."

**Being mindful of place.** The Metairie Country Club and One Shell Square projects share some common threads. For instance, they both require the The McDonnell Group's team to work in and around occupied buildings. "The biggest challenge is keeping this country club operational while we renovate," said Kirk LaBorde, The McDonnell Group Project Superintendent for Metairie Country Club. The kitchen, restaurant, and meeting room must remain open throughout the project, and those are the simpler requirements, LaBorde said. "I haven't worked on anything that has as much of a retrofit challenge," he >>



said. LaBorde has done a lot of hospital projects, but said they are less difficult, even when working in functioning areas. But the medical renovations and additions did prepare LaBorde for another part of the club project — making sure the old and new components match. Hospitals never want their additions to look like additions. The Metairie Country Club insists on a seamless appearance throughout the historically accurate restoration.


Since the 1920s, the club modified facilities to keep pace with safety codes, but typically added on in the easiest and cheapest way. Addition of modern features like sprinklers and air conditioning many times ignored the original building design. LaBorde said this time the Metairie Country Club has a definite plan for what it wants — “2007 standards with a 1930s look,” he said.

The country club project has had some surprises. “We open up a wall and find mahogany beams,” LaBorde said. Retaining those beams becomes the first priority. But if the beams are irreparably damaged by water, the alternative is to find a new beam that’s a match. To recapture the club’s original look, the project also will expose ceiling beams that for decades hid behind a drop ceiling.

**Being mindful of people.** While Metairie County Club’s patrons may seek recreation first and business incidentally, One Shell Square is business-centered. Shell is one of the largest employers in downtown New Orleans. Shell employees continue to work during the renovation. The daily logistics of keeping construction from interfering with business falls to Project Superintendent Joseph Montalbano.

In renewing its lease, Shell reaffirmed its commitment to a city where it has long been resident. New Orleans is as much a home to Shell as is Houston. Shell’s strong continuing presence in New Orleans spurs employment opportunities, Silva said. Shell will be one of the last major oil companies to base operations in the city after Katrina.

Shell also demonstrates how mindful it is of place and people by using environmentally friendly methods, according to Silva. Carpet recycling is an environmentally sensitive part of the renovation project. The building also will have a state-of-the-art audio-visual system to conduct global electronic conferences, helping to reduce travel-related fuel use.

After Hurricane Katrina struck in August 2005, Shell and The McDonnell Group took different paths to confirm their commitment to New Orleans. When the levees broke, The McDonnell Group had to vacate its Metairie office to use Baton Rouge as its interim headquarters, but its commitment to its New Orleans area home remains unwavering. 



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