

# Renovation gives Fisk’s historic Boyd House new life

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Ford Photographs - Nashville Architectural Photographer  
Gabe Ford

Fisk University has restored a historic campus building that was once home to one of Nashville’s most influential families.

The Boyd family’s house, located at **1601 Meharry Blvd.**, was bought by the university in 1938 and has been used as a residence for Fisk’s president and now serves as office space. R.H. Boyd, a prominent Nashville Black businessman, founded R.H. Boyd Publishing Corporation in 1896 and then helped establish Citizen Savings Bank and Trust, now touted as the country’s oldest operating Black-owned bank. Boyd’s son and daughter-in-law, both prominent Nashvillians on their own, lived in the home, designed by McKissack & McKissack, billed as the oldest Black-owned architectural firm in America.

With the historical significance of the Boyd family home, Fisk has also expressed its excitement about the \$1.4 million transformation of the once-battered building into a “hub of activity” for the campus, the project’s leaders said.

The Boyd House was in danger of being demolished in 2020 but Fisk began fundraising to **save the home** after citizens and preservationists, including Tennessee State University history professor Learotha Williams, raised concerns.



Old exterior  
Photo: Bradley

“We were in the process of getting ready to actually take the building down,” said Scott DeLano, co-founder and owner of Certified Construction Services, which served as the contractor. “There was some water damage. There was a fire up in the attic at one time. So, the structure of the building was in pretty bad shape.”



New Boyd House exterior  
Photo: Ford Photographs

DeLano said the company has worked with Fisk on many projects and had an understanding of the fiscal constraints.

“We were very excited ... because to tear this building down would have been a tragedy,” DeLano said.

The Metro Historical Commission made clear the integrity of the exterior of the building was going to be an important part of the renovation. As the work began, DeLano said the company was able to use old photos of the home from the university and the Boyd family as reference points.

“It was hard to see in the beginning what was even supposed to be there,” said Jared Bradley, president and founder of The Bradley Projects, the architect of record for the renovation. “Looking at it now, looking at the historical accuracy is pretty unbelievable.”

When seeking to match the look of the old building, those involved in the work focused on the front porch, windows, wood-clad siding and a historic brick to match the building for an elevator shaft that had to be built for code compliance.

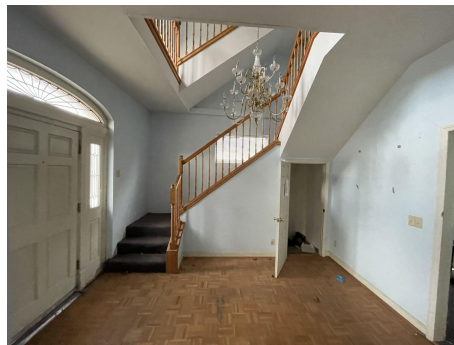
“It looks pretty natural to the building and it’s put in a location where it’s not sitting right on the corner,” DeLano said.

The contractors had to replace the roof of the building and match its original look. Workers also removed all the walls and floors inside the Boyd House and completely rebuilt them, taking care to replicate key pieces like the open staircase.

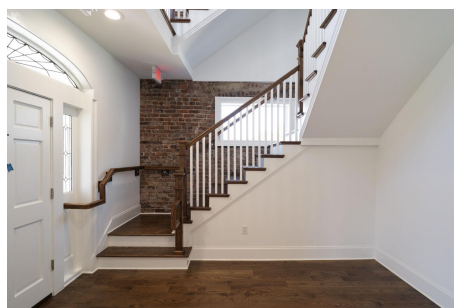
“We were able to keep the bones of the project, which was super important to us and the university,” DeLano said.

He added that the front doors and upper outdoor patio doors remained from the original construction of the home. The structure had stained glass transoms above each door that the contractors were able to keep.

Bradley said even something like the lighting quality inside feels both up to date and historically correct because of the use of a natural color palette between the hardwood floors and white walls, while the windows allow in natural light.



Old interior staircase  
Photo: Bradley



New staircase inside  
Photo: Ford Photographs

“I think the before and after process is usually pretty exciting for architects,” Bradley said. “You can really get a sense of the historical soul and context of the buildings. I think the Fisk buildings have more of that than any other buildings we’ve ever worked on in terms of having this contextual sort of accuracy and excitement about them.”