

From the Puget Sound Business Journal:

<http://www.bizjournals.com/seattle/print-edition/2015/05/29/old-auto-shop-s-16m-makeover-expand-and-reuse-a-91.html>

Structures

# Old auto shop's \$16M makeover: Expand and reuse a 91-year-old building without killing its soul

🔑 **SUBSCRIBER CONTENT:** May 29, 2015, 3:00am PDT

She started laying the groundwork for it 16 years ago. Now Seattle real estate developer Liz Dunn's much-anticipated project is opening.

The structural engineering feat, however, "was a little more than we bargained for," Dunn said.

To create the \$16 million Chophouse Row, Dunn and her team repurposed a 91-year-old auto-parts store and music practice space, and then built a five-story, steel-and-concrete structure on top of it.



BUSINESS JOURNAL PHOTO | ANTHONY BOLANTE

Everything old is new again in Liz Dunn's latest Capitol Hill hot spot.

This final piece of Dunn's collection of properties in the heart of Capitol Hill, Chophouse Row, brings the first new office space to the Seattle neighborhood in almost 80 years, along with a center-block courtyard that promises to be one of the hill's best small gathering spaces.

The complex melding of old and new wasn't entirely new territory for her.

In 1999, Dunn started buying old buildings between 11th and 12th avenues, and now her company, Dunn & Hobbes, owns roughly half the block between East Pike and Union streets.

She redeveloped the properties, retaining some of the old character but adding modern structures. Today the properties house around two dozen apartments and local businesses ranging from restaurant La Spiga to hardware store Pacific Supply Co.

Completion of Chophouse Row— named for the band rehearsal space that formerly occupied the building — will bring a cheese shop, cafe and other businesses to the Pike-Pine neighborhood. Office space and three penthouse apartments are above.

### **European vibe**

The project, at 1424 11th Ave., has a European feel, like Melrose Market about 10 blocks to the west that Dunn co-developed. At Melrose, Dunn's team turned old auto shops into restaurants, an oyster bar, butcher and other merchants.

At Chophouse Row, Seattle structural engineering firm M A Wright devised the plan to bolt the addition to the old building.

There was one big problem: the old building wasn't quite square. General contractor MRJ Constructors had to make on-the-go adjustments throughout the renovation. Shannon Loew of real estate

development company FIX managed the project, which was originally scheduled to open last fall.

Adding to the construction challenge has been scheduling the interior build-outs of the 10 retail and office tenants, which Dunn said was like “herding cats.”

It seems to have worked out extremely well. Inspiring spaces are tucked throughout the project with high ceilings and creative mezzanines that offer some stop-you-in-your tracks views.

Two Seattle architecture firms – Sundberg Kennedy Ly-Au Young, and Graham Baba – designed Chophouse Row, and Lesley Bain of Framework advised on the urban design and master-planning.

### **Farmers and films**

Next up is figuring out how to program the plaza.

“We have a million ideas and so do the tenants,” Dunn said, ticking off some possibilities: wine tastings, farmers markets and outdoor movies.

Dunn said chef Matt Dillon plans to have outdoor seating for his restaurant, Upper Bar Ferd’nand, which will face onto the courtyard. It’s an expansion for Bar Ferd’nand in Melrose Market.

Even a business not in one of Dunn’s buildings is planning to get in on the action. The back of Cupcake Royale is perched above the plaza, and owner Jody Hall is planning to build a bar there where customers can sit.

Across the plaza is Pacific Supply Co., which leases space from Dunn & Hobbs. The hardware store lost some parking to the Chophouse Row project, but store manager John Bowden doesn’t mind. In fact, he said, he loves the outcome.

“It’s a great project (that ties) the neighborhood together,” said Bowden, who’s planning to add a customer service bench by the store’s back door that leads to the plaza.

One of the most alluring aspects of the development is how the shops and restaurants will open onto the street and the new pedestrian alleyway that connects 11th Avenue at the front of the building to the plaza. From there, people can enter the back doors to about 15 businesses.

The public will be able to tour Chophouse Row during a grand opening June 11.

### **Merchants rush to fill up sidewalk spaces**

With their shops opening up onto the sidewalk, alley and plaza, retailers will be the face of Chophouse Row:

**Chop Shop Cafe & Bar:** Volunteer Park Cafe’s Ericka Burke (pictured) will open a new restaurant to anchor the entrance of Chophouse Row.

**NICHEoutside:** The garden lifestyle boutique sells tools, plants and gifts. Open.

**Kurt Farm Shop:** Vashon Island dairy farmer Kurt Timmermeister sells ice cream, cheeses and plant starts. Open.

**Amandine:** The bakery specializes in macarons, and other treats to complement coffee. Coming soon.

**Upper Bar Ferd’nand:** Chef Matt Dillon is expanding his Melrose Market bar, wine shop and cafe. Coming soon.

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