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Creative Spaces: New Lives for Abandoned Buildings

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My husband, [Richard Florida](#) and I were recently in Maastricht, The Netherlands to attend a conference on sustainable buildings and adaptive reuse. The region is awash in abandoned buildings, including manufacturing plants, schools and churches. Some of them were victims of the financial crisis; others could no longer justify their high operating costs. Many of these buildings still had beauty and economic value; all that was missing was a savvy developer to repurpose them into adaptable new forms. One of them -- an abandoned monastery that had served time as a government office building -- had found new life as a five-star hotel.

How can a building be retrofitted for an entirely different form and purpose and still keep its authenticity, history and functionality? This Creative Spaces series features some of most inspired repurposed buildings we've seen, in Maastricht and elsewhere. With the help of my colleague at the Creative Class Group, [Steven Pedigo](#), we've assembled this slide show.

Kruisherenhotel, Maastricht, The Netherlands



Built in the 14th century as a monastery for the Crutched Friars, the complex, which includes a Gothic church, enjoyed a brief second life as a government office building before it was abandoned in 1979. Late in 2000, it was thoroughly renovated and repurposed as a luxurious, five-star hotel. The old monastery houses most of the guestrooms, while the Renaissance-style concierge building and a newly-built annex accommodate the remaining spaces. The former church now contains a stunning reception area, conference rooms, a library, a boutique and a coffee bar.

Photo Credit: Holly Hayes, Flickr

Evergreen Brick Works, Toronto, Canada



For almost a century, the Don Valley Brick Works produced up to 43 million bricks a year that were used in construction all across Canada. Abandoned and appropriated by the city of Toronto and the Toronto Region Conservation Authority in the 1980s, the site is now an expansive park and beautiful nature preserve in the middle of the city. Its 16 historic factory buildings house a vibrant farmers' market, an organic restaurant, gallery, and educational and environmental programs.

Photo Credit: Tom Arban

Water Mill Center, Water Mill, New York



A former Western Union communications research facility near the Hamptons on the eastern end of Long Island, the Watermill Center has been transformed into a “laboratory for performance” by the theatrical legend Robert Wilson. It includes a 6,000 volume research library, galleries, rehearsal and staging spaces, workshops, offices, and residences situated on six acres of artist-designed and landscaped grounds.

Photo Credit: Flickr User Tbruce

Torpedo Factory Art Center, Alexandria, Virginia



Built in 1918 on the banks of the Potomac as a production and storage facility for torpedoes, the complex was taken over by the Smithsonian Institution in the 1950s, which used it for storage. In 1969, the city of Alexandria bought the buildings and renovated them into working studio spaces for artists and craftspeople. Today, it is one of the largest and most successful visual arts centers in the country, where over 160 professional artists create, display, and sell their work

Photo Credit: Flickr User Matturick

Liberty Hotel, Boston, Massachusetts



This imposing granite edifice was constructed between 1848 and 1851 according to the Auburn Plan, a humane design for prisons, complete with a rotunda, a cupola, a 90-foot atrium, and 30 33-foot-high arched windows. The Charles Street Jail was the temporary home of such luminaries as Sacco and Vanzetti and Malcolm X before it was closed because of overcrowding in 1990. Though traces of its 220 former cells can be still be seen in its lobby bar, it is now a luxurious hotel with 300 guestrooms and five upscale restaurants.

Photo Credit: Digital Shotgun, Flickr

Kraanspoor, Amsterdam, The Netherlands



Kraanspoor means "crane track" which is what this concrete structure was when it was erected in 1952 as part of the Dutch Dock and Shipbuilding Company's facilities. Two cranes traveled up and down tracks that ran its length, while ships under construction were tied alongside it. It was abandoned in 1984 until it was repurposed as the base for a 134,549 sq. ft. glass-walled office building in 2007.

Photo Credit: Jeroen Bennink, Flickr

Gerding Theater at the Armory, Portland, Oregon



Built as a National Guard Armory in 1891 and renovated and reborn in 2006, the Gerding Theater at the Armory has received the U.S. Green Building Council's highest certification level: LEED Platinum. Rainwater is captured in a 10,000-gallon underground cistern and used in the bathrooms; skylights supply natural lighting; chilled beams and airflow cavities under the risers provide energy-efficient cooling; and the electrical system performs 30 per cent more efficiently than code.

Photo Credit: Portland Center Stage, Flickr

Caixa Forum, Madrid Spain



A post-modern art gallery that was designed by the Swiss architecture firm Herzog & de Meuron and built in Madrid between 2001 and 2007. Its main building is the abandoned Mediodia Electric Power Station. Several new floors were built on top of it and encased in rusted steel. A towering vertical garden grows along the wall of the building next door.

Photo Credit: Sincretic, Flickr

Nomadic Museum, New York, New York



A 45,000 sq. ft. temporary museum space constructed out of shipping containers on New York City's Pier 54 in 2005 to house the photographer Gregory Colbert's exhibition "Ashes and Snow." The installation has since travelled to Santa Monica, Tokyo, and Mexico City.

Photo Credit: Paolo Mazzoleni, Flickr

Hotel de Rome, Berlin, Germany



This luxury hotel was originally constructed in 1889 by the architect Ludwig Heim (who would be appointed the government's master builder) to house the head office of the Dresdner Bank. The renovation was completed in 2006.

Photo Credit: Mr172, Flickr