

ULI Chicago 7th Annual Vision Awards
June 13, 2018



Project Finalist: REVEL MOTOR ROW

Project Team:

Developer/Owner: Property Adventures Corp.

Architect: Filoramo Talsma Architecture

Historic Preservation Advisor: MacRostie Historic Advisors LLC

Project Description:

Revel Motor Row is comprised of two adjacent local landmarks along Chicago's iconic Michigan Avenue Motor Row: the former Illinois Automobile Club (IAC) / Chicago Defender Building (completed in 1936) and the former Cadillac Motor Car Company Showroom (completed in 1909). Both buildings were vacant for nearly a decade until developer Property Adventures purchased the buildings to create a combined event venue with the help of Chicago-based Revel Group. The result is an exciting new event production space that celebrates the history of these two landmarks and the historic Motor Row District, and takes advantage of their proximity to new McCormick Square and the growing South Loop neighborhood.

The Illinois Automobile Club, completed in 1936, originally housed a driving enthusiast organization. Architect Philip Maher's combination of Mission and Art Moderne style design originally housed public lounges and help desks for travelers, an indoor swimming pool, and even a private apartment for club members located in the corner tower. The building later housed the offices of the Chicago Defender, one of the nation's most influential African American newspapers. The Defender occupied the building for nearly four decades until they relocated in 2006.

The Cadillac Building, located next door and completed in 1909, is one of the earliest automobile showrooms constructed along what became Chicago's early twentieth century Motor Row. The terra cotta-clad Cadillac Building, designed by architects Jenney, Mundie, & Jensen, originally housed a ground floor showroom and garage and upstairs work spaces.

When Property Adventures purchased the buildings in 2014, the IAC / Defender Building was in danger of demolition, suffering from nearly 10 years of vandalism and broken water pipes that had burst in the building and destroyed much of the building's historic 1930s plasterwork and wood paneling. The Cadillac Building had been gutted, though remnants of the original showroom's decorative ceiling plaster and tile flooring remained. Using federal historic tax credits and with help from architects Filoramo Talsma and preservation consultants MacRostie Historic Advisors, Property Adventures has restored both buildings according to Illinois SHPO, National Park Service, and Commission on Chicago Landmarks design standards while creatively reusing the buildings as a combined event venue.

The IAC / Defender Building original steel windows were replicated and stained glass retained and cleaned. The historic tower was repaired, including its original motor car weather vane that still tops the building. Inside, the building's former lobbies and meeting rooms will operate as event spaces under the name "Revel Motor Row." The interior's historic paneling and plasterwork was replicated exactly and former visitor spaces that had been previously subdivided for offices were reopened and returned to their 1936 appearance. Original plaster relief maps of North and Central America -- used to help 1930s drivers plan their travels -- were cleaned and reinstalled in the building's restored Michigan Avenue lounge. Upstairs, damaged woodwork in the tower apartment and 3rd floor executive dining room was restored and these spaces reserved for smaller events. The sky-lit IAC swimming pool room, later home to the Defender's printing presses, now houses the building's largest event space. South across the IAC / Defender's new outdoor courtyard event space, the Cadillac Building houses a new downstairs event space with Revel Group offices upstairs. Missing original windows have

been replicated, including original storefronts along Michigan Avenue. Ceiling and floor fragments were used to replicate the original showroom's decorative tile paving and ornate plaster work at the building's Michigan Avenue entrance.

The transformation of the Illinois Automobile Club / Defender Building and Cadillac Building into Revel Motor Row has secured the continued life of two Motor Row landmarks and creates another important commercial anchor in Chicago's South Loop community.