



VIRGINIA HAMRICK

# Beautifully fresh

*Patisserie Torres is part of a renewed downtown building*

*By Erika Howsare*

Transforming the building that now houses Patisserie Torres was “almost like an archaeological dig,” says architect David Timmerman with BRW Architects. It was a year-long process just to renovate the exterior of the 1820s building on the corner of Third Street NE and the Downtown Mall—a building that has seen its share of change and damage.

As workers were creeping through what Timmerman calls a “brick-by-brick renovation” on the exterior—as well as shoring up against structural problems and remediating water damage—Brian Helleberg, whose signature restaurant Fleurie is just across the way, took notice. “I realized the owner was doing a major renovation properly here,” he says.

Helleberg thought the former Cappellino’s Crazy Cakes spot, tucked into the bottom level, might help him solve a space crunch in the Fleurie kitchen, while giving his pastry chef Serge Torres a chance to realize his dream of a dedi-

cated pastry shop. “We wanted to get the flour-based things out of Fleurie—the people whose skills are tailored to bread, pasta, gnocchi,” he says. A cooler-temperature, marble-topped workspace would give Torres what he needed while opening space in Fleurie.

Still, the patisserie space is only 700 square feet, so Helleberg and Timmerman had to think carefully to make it serve its functions. A curved wall, continuous with the counter and pastry cases, divides the room without shutting customers out. “There needed to be a definite boundary, but also transparency,” says Timmerman, who also wanted to “celebrate interaction, and bring the public into the kitchen.” This happens not only inside but from the mall, as a large window allows a view of baking in progress. Patisserie Torres may even offer baking classes, with students gathering around the work island, in the future.

Spaces both for presentation—like the pastry showcase facing the entry door—and for

storage are cleverly built into the design. Flour and other ingredients can be stored in bins under the work island, and overhead cabinets are built into a curved soffit that echoes the lines of the counter.

It’s all designed to make working more efficient and to connect customers to the “sophistication and playfulness,” as Timmerman puts it, of the pastries Torres creates. These include sweet and savory treats, many inspired by the South of France, just like the colors and materials of the patisserie: lavender paint and gray slate flooring.

The remainder of the building houses the offices of the local PBS station on the first floor, and startup business offices upstairs. Timmerman enjoyed making a “contemporary intervention in the historic context,” adding a glass and steel façade that didn’t mimic, but tried to enhance, the existing structure. “We’ve been able to bring dynamism to this corner,” he says.

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