

Historic downtown Columbus office building gets new life with BBCO

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Columbus-based architecture firm BBCO bought an historic downtown Columbus building for its new office.

Bhakti Bania, CEO of BBCO, said the move from the firm's Riverside Drive office to 328 S. High St. was spurred by growth.

Bania and her husband Bharat Baste, the firm's COO, left Meyers + Associates in 2009 to start BBCO. Since then, the firm has grown to 15 employees and BBCO has plans to double in the new space.



Photo credit: Brad Feinknopf

BBCO's revenue was \$2.6 million in 2023.

"We're excited to be downtown and be part of what's happening downtown," Bania told me. "This part of High Street is seeing revitalization and there is a lot of investment in this area."

Once the I-70 cap project is finished, employees and tenants of the office building walking to German Village and the Brewery District will be easier. This part of High Street is also part of the proposed City Center DORA.

BBCO is taking about 7,400 square feet on the building's fourth and fifth floors.

There are two floors of office space available, each about 3,600 square feet. The ground floor tenant is moving out, and Bania said they hope to attract a commercial tenant, such as a deli or coffee shop.

Before BBCO and partners Day Cos. bought the Schlee-Kemmler building for \$2.1 million at the end of 2022, it had been mostly vacant since at least 2019.

"It's really exciting to take what was a historic, vacant building and bring it back to a good use," Bania said, adding that the architecture firm is the perfect owner to breathe life back into the building.

Renovations revealed original tin ceilings hidden by drop ceiling panels and original hardwood that had been covered by carpet for decades. All its windows are original.

"As people who appreciate good architecture and whose work is anchored in sustainability, it's been an honor and joy to restore this space back to its original glory," Bania said.

The new office space features open concept work stations with four sound-proof booths for private conversations or calls. "The things you need in an office are changing," Bania said.

Creating spaces in which people want to congregate was important. "We wanted the best spaces to be common, so that everyone could use them," Baste said.

Both said a company's culture needs to be at the center of redesigning offices to accommodate the way most people work today.

"It's not a one-size-fits-all approach, but you cannot continue business as usual," Bania said.

The Schlee-Kemmler Building was originally built as a brewer's office and insurance agency. It has housed a variety of tenants over the years.

The building was finished in 1895 and was home to Echenrode Furniture Co. for decades.

There also is a three-story building behind the five-story office building that the firm might turn into apartments. The two buildings were originally separate, but were connected in recent years.