

Inside out

A GLIMPSE BEHIND THE WALLS OF NORWALK'S CORPORATE OFFICES

Lock Building

18 and 20 Marshall St.

By CHRIS BOSAK
Hour Staff Writer

Photos by ERIK TRAUTMANN



NORWALK — History emanates from every wall of the Lock Building in South Norwalk. You could see it, smell it, touch it, hear it. You can even feel it in your bones — especially when a train rumbles by on the nearby tracks and trestles.

At the same time, the Lock Building is magnificently updated and home to some of the most cutting edge and innovative businesses in the area. Each company has space that is wonderfully unique, yet all showcase the historic nature of the building.

Exposed spiral ductwork and wood beams, brick walls and historic wood floors are interior elements common to all of the office spaces and many of the doors throughout the building are covered with sheets of silver steel. Modern lighting dangling from those exposed ceilings, wall art of all styles and eras, and big, bold, colorful company logos behind the reception desks bring the building to the present and, in some cases, well into the future.

"That was our goal, to preserve the best of the past and weld it into the future," said Clay Fowler, principal at Spinnaker Co., which renovated the building and co-owns it with Greenfield Acquisition Partners and Summit Development. "Everybody involved in this project is very proud. It's a showcase in the area of what you can do with a little effort."

The Lock Building was built in 1856 and was the longtime home of the Norwalk Lock Company, which added on to the building 14 times through 1941. The building was abandoned in the 1960s and later became a place for artists to live and work. It was slated for demolition in 1999 before preservation interests stepped in to save it.

Today the Lock Building boasts about 100,000 square feet of some of the most unique office space in Fairfield County. Located next to the Maritime Aquarium and Maritime Parking Lot on the corner of Marshall and North Water St., it is three floors and a lower level.

The Lock Building has won numerous awards by various architecture and building organizations and it was partially responsible for the City of Norwalk being designated as a Preserve America Community.

The building is 100 percent leased and several tenants have already expanded their space within the building.

"We've seen significant growth of a lot of start-up companies," said Mike Brown, project manager with Spinnaker. "Most of the original tenants have expanded within the building."

While there are no mega-sized leases, the tenant roster is impressive — and eclectic. Navios is in the shipping industry, Nat Nast — the inventor of the silk bowling shirt — is in luxury men's apparel, Marshall Street Management is a private investment firm, Red Rocket is an advertising firm, Dogname.com is an Internet advertising/marketing company, Impala Partners is a financial advisory boutique, and Byte Interactive — with its logo of a growling blue dog — is a digital marketing agency.

Yachting Magazine and Motor Boating Magazine are there as well; and the tenant list also includes all three of the owning partners. There is no communal cafeteria, but Papaya Thai is located in a corner of the building, and a plethora of South Norwalk restaurants are within easy walking distance. In all, about 25 companies call the Lock Building home.

"The building attracted a lot of marketing and creative-type tenants," Brown added. "It was leased even before we finished it."

Brown added that the electrical, plumbing, mechanical and roofing work has been updated.

A large piece of the past sits in a conference room of Greenfield Partners as a hulking steam boiler serves as a decorative complement to the wooden floor, steel catwalk and exposed brick walls.

"We abated it and cleaned it up," Brown said of the boiler. "We brought wood in from a barn upstate for the floor."

The conference room is hardly behind the times, however, as it is equipped with video con-



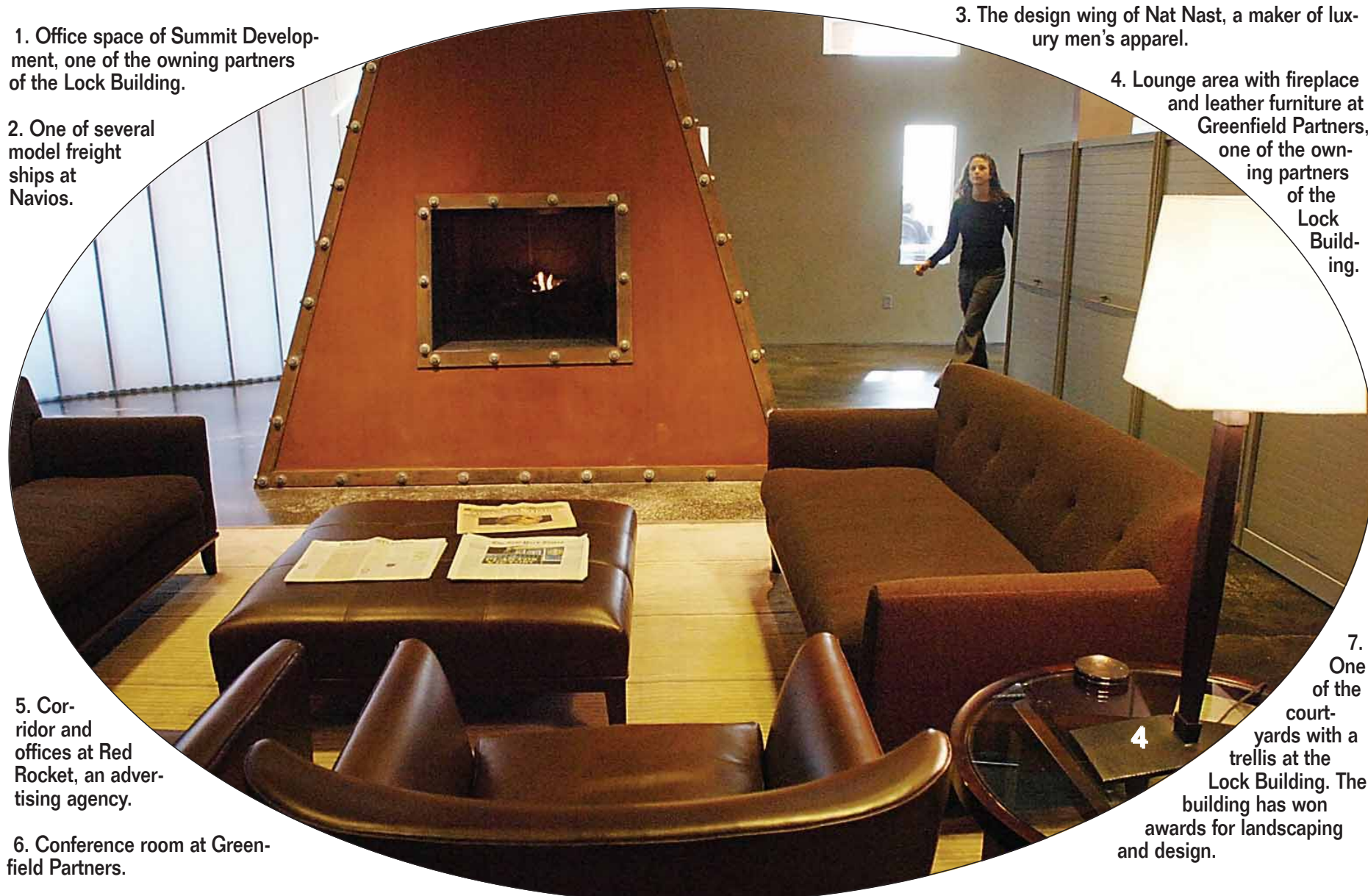
1. Office space of Summit Development, one of the owning partners of the Lock Building.



2. One of several model freight ships at Navios.



3. The design wing of Nat Nast, a maker of luxury men's apparel.



4. Lounge area with fireplace and leather furniture at Greenfield Partners, one of the owning partners of the Lock Building.

5. Corridor and offices at Red Rocket, an advertising agency.

6. Conference room at Greenfield Partners.

7. One of the courtyards with a trellis at the Lock Building. The building has won awards for landscaping and design.



ferencing and WiFi capability. The room also looks out to a courtyard with fountain.

The first impression of Greenfield's space is just as poignant as a large triangular fireplace with a rust-colored faux finish directs visitors' attention beyond the reception area and past several offices set off by translucent curved acrylic panels.

Greenfield is currently expanding its space within the building and a footbridge with rainbow lighting leads the way to the expansion.

Enter the Navios Corp. office and visitors have no doubt what type of business they are in as models of freight ships are the main attraction. The reception area is dominated by a large replica of a ship in a lit case cabinet. Three other smaller-scaled ships rest in enclosed built-in shelves behind the reception desk. Plaques describing the ships S.S. Ore Titan, S.S. Ore Chief, S.S. Ore Saturn and S.S. Ore Jupiter finish off the reception area.

The "dividing wall" between the trading floor and a conference room is actually a large glass case showing off a six-foot replica of the ship Cerro Altamira. The conference room, which features porthole windows on the swinging doors, has another model ship and a several framed art pieces with a Tokyo motif.

Navios gives the Lock Building an international feel as four round clocks set with a black background reveal four different time zones.

Across the hall is home to the inventor of the silk bowling shirt and the company responsible getting men out of their stuffy dress shirts and into more comfortable casual clothing: Nat Nast, a maker of luxury garments.

An original tenant, Nat Nast is one of several companies that has expanded its space within the building. Large framed Nat Nast promotional posters showing travel, outdoor and sporting scenes grace the walls, while a display table fea-



tures old-time bowling equipment.

"We have guests from all over the world and everybody loves coming here," said Melody Lane, marketing and project director at Nat Nast. "This is a great building. It's just a fabulous place to work."

Angled plated-steel partitions that outline wheelchair accessibility leads to the offices of Red Rocket, an advertising agency with back-to-back "r's" divided by a rocket as a logo. The lobby area reveals the cutting edge and hip nature of the company. Six signed electric guitars hang on the wall, while a fishbowl and red rocket lamp decorate the reception desk. Paper lanterns hanging from the wall and red computers accent the interior.

The Red Rocket space also features a conference room, creative lounge and fitness center.

Across the hall, the offices of Marshall Street Management have a much different character, but are no less impressive. The company, founded and managed by Priceline.com co-founder



Jesse Fink, chose a more formal, natural, woody feel for its offices. In fact the scent of wood lingers throughout the space.

Landscape art — some color, some black and white — hangs on the walls and a small display of antique wooden propellers rests at the end of a long shelf near the lobby. Planters with live plants are scattered throughout the space.

Different architects are responsible for the individual offices in the building, but Bruce Beinfield of Norwalk was the primary architect involved with the renovation.

"Everyone wanted to keep the rough industrial character of the building, so we kept to that end," Beinfield said. "(Preserving history) has its own challenges. You have to work with the building a lot more. There are certain things that you want to do, but can't. You need to have an awareness of the dos and don'ts of restoring old buildings."

Dogname.com, an Internet advertising agency, has a polished cement floor with modern lighting dropping down from a ceiling with exposed duct work. The space has access to a landscaped courtyard with a sprawling trellis.

Visitors to the offices of Summit Development, one of the owning partners, are greeted by Oriental rugs and offices featuring interior framed windows. A glance around the corner reveals a large room with exposed wood beams, more office desks and a pool table smack dab in the center. A large stuffed fish hanging from the ceiling in the back corner stands out from across the room. The room overlooks the Maritime Aquarium to the east and has views of Long Island Sound to the south.

"It's not typical corporate office space," Brown said. "Employees here get into their offices and really enjoy it, they enjoy working here. No two places are the same and not one is typical because of the historic nature of it."