



Design

by Diane Lea

Photography by Kinsley Dey

GREG HATEM SEES GOOD TIMES IN DOWNTOWN RALEIGH

Take a walk in Downtown Raleigh on newly reopened Fayetteville Street and enjoy the sense of being in a big city with small town manners.

The architecture is an appealing mix of periods and scale: the 1870s Briggs Hardware Building with its Victorian-Gothic façade; the mansard-roofed late 19th century French Second Empire Post Office; One Progress Plaza, a soaring pier-walled modern structure; the 1990s-style, 28-story skyscraper now called Wachovia Capital Center; newer high-rises and several older buildings that have been rehabilitated over the past 20 years.

Downtown also offers activity. Residents and workers – many living in the stylish new condominium projects in the downtown area – suburban shoppers, new and long-time merchants and service people, local and international business professionals, teachers, students, artists and musicians are walking briskly, or window-shopping, or setting up their wares. They are also pausing to view WTVD's live on-the-air television shows broadcast from their offices facing Fayetteville Street underneath breaking news from a neon ticker tape.

And now there is a new-old vista. For the first time since 1976, it is possible to stand on Fayetteville Street where the old mall used to be and turn to the north and see William Nichols' magnificent North Carolina State Capitol, and then turn to the south and see the classical columns of Atwood & Weeks' 1932 Memorial Hall, now the centerpiece of the Progress Energy Center for the Performing Arts. And people

still smile, still say, "Hello," and open doors for each other.

Another pleasant surprise in Downtown Raleigh is the food. Olfactory senses are saluted by the pungent aromas of sidewalk vendors selling sausages and pretzels, or by



Hatem

the invigorating fragrance of fresh coffee and bakery goods served at sidewalk tables – and even the unmistakable tangy smell of a schooner of celebratory ale from the open doors of a dimly lit pub. The array of colorful, flavorful and visually appealing food in the heart of the historic grid of streets – laid out in 1792 by surveyor Will-

iam Christmas – puts an end forever to the old lament there is no place to dine Downtown.

DOWNTOWN MAN

Greg Hatem, Raleigh developer, entrepreneur and Downtown resident is managing partner of Empire Properties. He counts both food and historic preservation as key elements in his successful renovation and adaptive reuse of over 41 Downtown buildings. Hatem, a native of Roanoke Rapids, acquired his love of old buildings while growing up in his father's men's clothing store, located in what had been the town's 1930s-era movie theatre. "My father bought the building in the 1950s," says Hatem, "and revitalized it within the original 1930s envelope." In 1997 after living and working for a year in China, where his physician uncle worked from 1933 until his death in the 1980s, Hatem returned to Raleigh. "I received my degree in chemical engineering from North Carolina State University," he says. "But even before coming here to go to school, I felt it was a special place. In the fourth grade, we studied North Carolina history, and when my class visited Raleigh on a field trip, I thought, 'This is our capital city, and that's a big deal.' Years later, when I returned to NC State and saw Downtown, I wondered, 'Why aren't people doing more to preserve Downtown?'"

Fayetteville Street is now a street again, with views of the State Capitol and of Memorial Hall, centerpiece of the Progress Energy Center for the Performing Arts.



After helping a friend renovate an old building, Hatem began his own redevelopment of a 1950s open-truss warehouse at 117 S. West Street. Though he was initially turned down by two lenders skeptical about the project's viability, Hatem contends that old warehouses are great places for historic restoration and adaptive reuse. "The buildings are well built, straightforward, and their large open spaces are easier to renovate," he adds. "The one I redeveloped was known as the Coca-Cola Warehouse, and it had truss spans stretching 100 feet in two directions with no columns. We recruited Jillian's (a sports and entertainment bar) as the tenant," Hatem recalls, "and that active use of space had a



Fine dining in a chic urban décor is part of the new Downtown scene.

huge impact on the warehouse district." For his next project, Hatem took on the redevelopment of a four-building complex in Raleigh's historic depot section between Martin and Davie Streets and called it Commerce Place for the narrow street that connected the two. Designed to appeal to a mixed-use tenant base, the complex houses a popular restaurant, Nana's chop-house, and offers warehouse space adapted for office and retail. "When we bought the buildings and started the project, Anthony Ulinski, an artist and craftsman and owner of Dovetail Woodworks, was already a tenant," says Hatem. "We wanted to encourage that clientele in the area and asked him to stay on. Dovetail is still at 24 Commerce Place as our anchor tenant."

Food was still in the mix for Empire's

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next Downtown renovation at 222 S. Blount Street, but this time Hatem was testing a new venue. His friend David Mao wanted to open a high-end Asian bistro to offer Raleighites the kind of sophisticated food and restaurant design they would experience in New York or Chicago. Hatem, who often partners with the businesses that occupy his buildings, worked with Mao to complete the Duck and Dumpling. "When we purchased the building, *The News & Observer* commented that Empire saw potential in developing in East Raleigh and adjacent to Moore Square, Hatem says. "Some thought that was the wrong side of Fayetteville Street for what we were trying to do, but Moore Square is still at the heart of the city and the people got it."

Ask around Downtown about the new best thing and you will hear *The Raleigh Times* touted. No, the venerable newspaper of that name has not resurrected itself at 14 E. Hargett Street, its old location, but its namesake is Hatem's latest renovation venture and most recent food emporium. Hatem is enthusiastic about the architecture and history of the 1906 building that



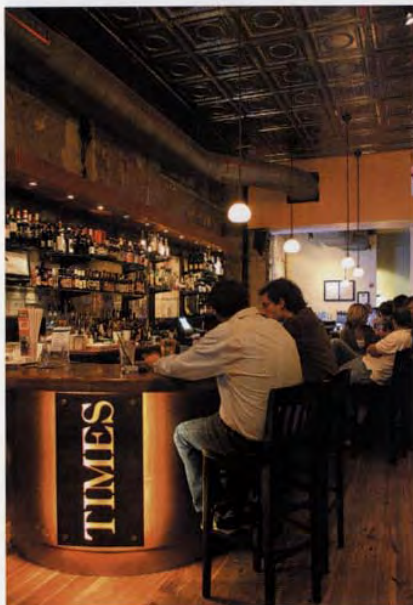
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The Morning Times (top and above), offering coffees, bakery goods and take-out foods opens at 6:30 am.



The Raleigh Times Bar (top and above), is a popular spot for outdoor dining and its lively bar.

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The Duck and Dumpling features high-end Asian cuisine in its location adjacent to Moore Square.

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features intricate masonry and a turn-of-the-century, mixed-use plan with two street level storefronts and a staircase between to access the upstairs office originally occupied by the *Raleigh Evening Times* newspaper. *The Raleigh Times* eventually bought the *Raleigh Evening Times* and moved their offices to the building and rented the storefronts to The Office Supply Store and the Electric Shoe Shop. "The building has wonderful architecture and *The Times* was such an important piece of the community," says Hatem. So many historic artifacts were found in the building during Hatem's certified historic renovation, he decided to turn the main level into a restau-



The Pour House, a Duck and Dumpling neighbor.



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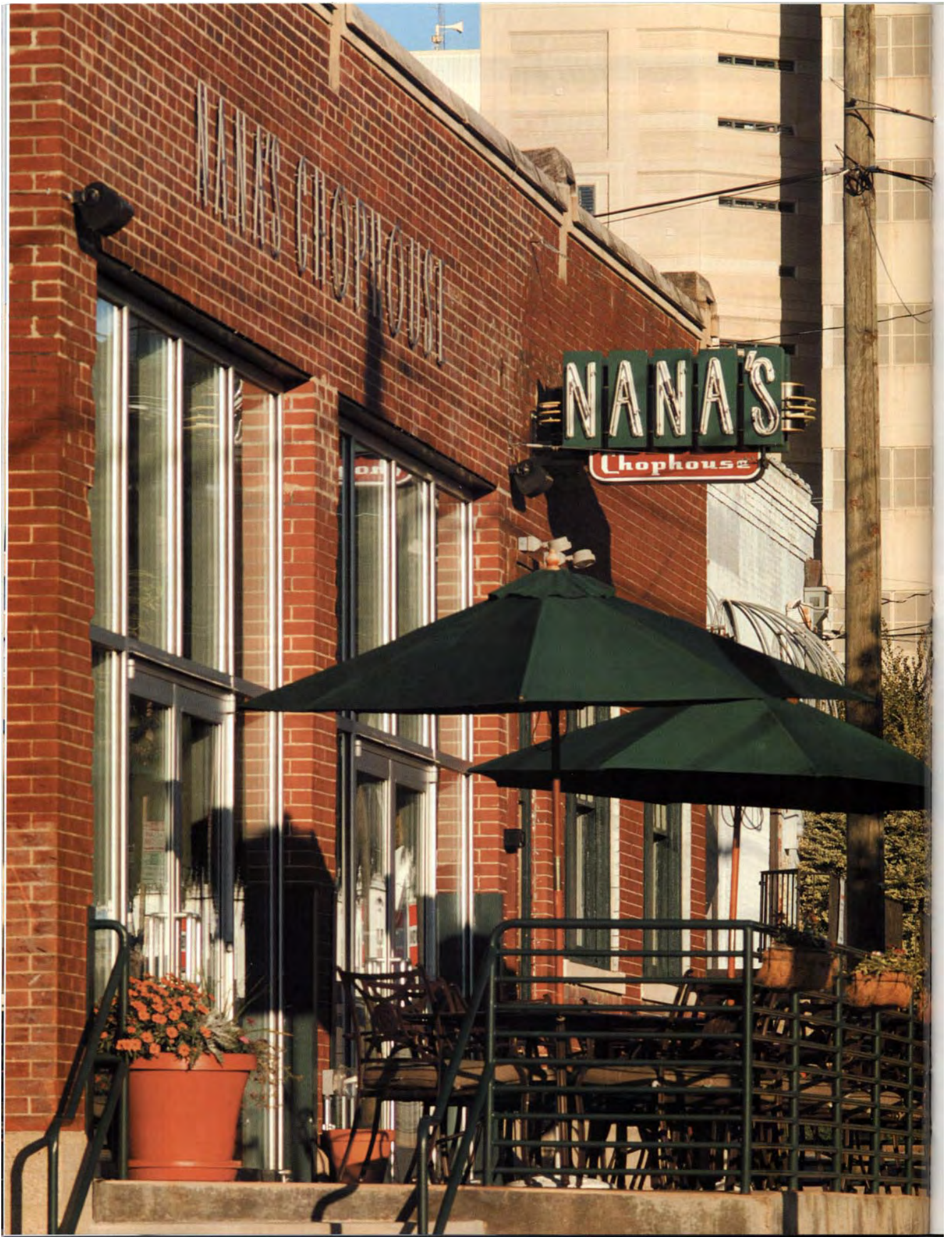
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Empire Eats, and designed by New York City architect Steven Jacobs of SBJ Group, *The Lafayette* is modeled after *The Library*, a New York hotel renovation project. Adhering to Empire's successful formula of mixed-use development, the 21-story Lafayette will have retail space and a signature 200-seat restaurant by *Enoteca Vin's* Ashley Christensen on the street level, and an 150-guest room boutique hotel above the restaurant and retail stores. *The Lafayette* will be topped off by 80 residential condos on the upper levels and will feature numerous amenities, including high technology rooms with plasma televisions, large suites to accommodate up to 35-person cocktail parties, a fitness center, and a rooftop bar and swimming pool.

Located just steps away from the new 500,000-square-foot Raleigh Convention Center set to open in 2008, *The Lafayette* is one of several new developments underway that will complement the revitalization of Downtown and its magnificent modernist convention center. The Center, currently under construction, will feature a grand lobby with floor-to-ceiling win-

dows, a spectacular exhibit hall, and a 4100-square-foot mezzanine at street level. It is attached to a new four-star Marriott Hotel. *The Lafayette* site is diagonally across from the complex. "A few years ago, 21 stories looked like a tall building for Downtown," says Hatem. "Now Downtown is embracing development like the 33-story RBC Centura Plaza, a mixed-use office and residential tower designed as corporate headquarters for RBC Centura with retail space. The best thing about it is there will be 139 residential condos sitting on top of an office building all on less than an acre of land."

Hatem welcomes the increased density of new Downtown development and sees it as the key to encouraging enough residents, workers and visitors to keep Fayetteville Street and Downtown thriving. Meanwhile, as Empire Properties launches *The Lafayette*, its first new construction project to add to the firm's portfolio of older buildings, Hatem and his colleagues can take pride in their success as major players in a new era for Downtown Raleigh. **MM**



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