



Photo by Robin May

Tonia Matherne and French Press owner Margaret Girouard

INTERIOR DESIGN — HISTORIC PRESERVATION

THE FRENCH PRESS AND THE REFINERY

POCHÉ PROUET

Poché Prouet and its parent company, The Southwest Group, have been a boon for downtown Lafayette, breathing new life into historic properties and helping ensure the future vibrancy of the district.

"As a piece of property comes up for sale, if it's at a reasonable price and we see that we can do something with it we pick it up," says company co-founder Jim Poché. "We understand how to do it. We understand the value of historic tax credits and all these other things, and we're just very familiar and very comfortable with it."

Exhibit A: The French Press on West Vermilion Street and The Refinery on Buchanan. Each, in its way, caters to the burgeoning metropolitan, urban class of young professionals attracted to downtown Lafayette. And each project transformed an aging property into a new purpose.

Built in the 1920s and originally the manufacturing home for

Dudley LeBlanc's famed — or is it infamous? — elixir, Hadacol, the Tribune Building on West Vermilion housing The French Press restaurant was for decades a printing plant.

Poché Prouet acquired the vacant building a couple of years ago and went to work, dividing it into three commercial spaces — Recycled Cycles shares the building — but doing so in a way that maintains the brick, stone and cement building's historic character.

Working with sister company Southwest Contractors, the design team stripped the building to its bare essentials, reutilizing existing materials and turning the industrial feel of the structure into a rough-hewn, artistically austere celebration of the building's past — perfect for the nouveau south Louisiana cuisine in which The French Press specializes.

A few blocks away, Poché Prouet's design team worked similar magic with The Refinery, located in the rear section of what was once the Abdalla's department store. The site has been transformed over several years, with Tsunami kicking off Lafayette's sushi craze and, most recently, the addition of the Buchanan Loft Lodging Hotel, another INDesign Gold winner.

A barber-spa for men, The Refinery, like The French Press, celebrates its commercial past while repositioning the space for the present. Designers took pains to reutilize existing materials and designs while giving the space a retro-modern character, and at the same time updating the electrical and plumbing systems to meet both the needs of the business and current building codes.

For Poché, contributing to the revitalization of downtown Lafayette is at once profitable yet personal. "Historically for me, when I grew up in Lafayette as a kid, that's the only place you could go shop," he recalls. "That's where Montgomery Ward's was, Sears, JC Penney's, McCrory's. And I went to school at Cathedral. So, personally, I grew up downtown and lived in the Saint Streets area most of my life. That's where I'm from."



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