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And for a Tribeca Artist, the Chance to Show a Very Visible Six-Story Fresco

Condos to be Created in Former High-Rise Refrigerator

by CARL GLASSMAN

Atlanta, the food importing company, has drawn up plans to turn its 16-story former warehouse and headquarters at Varick and North Moore Streets into residential housing. The conversion will give future residents the distinction of living in what was once an 80,000-square-foot refrigerator.

The plan calls for putting 69 loft-size apartments — probably condominiums — in a building originally designed to house tons of ham and cheese in cold darkness. Windows would be carved out of the stuccoed concrete facade to match the few that are already there. Recessed into what are now loading docks on North Moore Street would be two commercial spaces of about 3200 square feet each.

Before moving ahead on the project, the developer will need special approval from the city. Because the 70-year-old building is located in one of Tribeca's historic districts, Atlanta must show the Landmarks Preservation Commission that the conversion design, by restoration architect Joseph Pell Lombardi, is in keeping with its original look and with the surrounding area. And because it is in a manufacturing zone, they have to convince the City Planning Commission that they should be allowed stores or restaurants on the ground floor and that the upper

floors can't be profitably rented to a manufacturing tenant.

If it wins approval, construction on the project is expected to begin in the next 12 to 14 months and be completed about a year after that.

Since Atlanta moved to New Jersey in 1989, "the building has

meantime, Bel Canto expects to buy its own warehouse in Long Island City and move there in August.

The cold storage building was constructed in 1925 but its lineage is 19th century. It is the most recently built structure in a row of North Moore Street refrigerated

glamorous structures, such as a Hungarian castle, a 15th century Venetian palace, and the Cartier Building on Fifth Avenue, says 25 North Moore "was a very crisp, reinforced concrete structure when it was originally constructed. Over the years it had a fuzzy stuccoiness that's been added to the entire exterior." He says that will be removed and the building will be painted its original cream color. Canopies will be restored and repaired over the loading docks, maintaining the tunnel effect on that part of the block.

However, this being a preservation-conscious neighborhood, one question remains: what is to become of the six-story-high picture of Italian cheese displayed on the building's north side? Although Atlanta no longer has use for the building's interior, its northern facade — which in the past has displayed huge renderings of Hungarian hams and Finlindian cheeses — faces Holland Tunnel traffic and is prime billboard space. Soon, the cheese now occupying that space will become the final vestige of the building's former use.

Lombardi promises a "large open space" on that part of the building, with fewer windows, to allow for food art to remain there. In fact, he told the Trib that Atlanta has approved the concept of commissioning a Tribeca artist to use that space as a giant canvas for creating the next advertisement or some other food fresco that speaks to the neighborhood's glory days as a center for food wholesaling.

Artists who are interested in the project should call Joseph Lombardi at (212) 349-0700.



Just built, 25 North Moore as it appeared in 1925.



The architect's concept, as housing.

year in and year out lost money," says Glen Siegel, Atlanta's real estate representative. Bel Canto, the specialty food importer, now uses part of the building for cold storage and offices, but Siegel says taxes and operating expenses far exceed the rent that the building can generate, with losses put at more than \$300,000. Because the building lacks heat below the two top floors, Siegel says it is useless for many kinds of cry storage. And the freon coolant used for its cold storage will be banned by the Federal government in four years. In the

food warehouses erected by Merchant Refrigeration Co. The oldest, at 35-37 (now undergoing residential conversion), was built in 1891, followed by 31-33 in 1896 and 27-29 in 1905. The building at 25 North Moore, owned by Atlanta for the past 35 years, was designed by John B. Snook and Sons. The senior Snook was a prominent New York architect who designed many of the cast iron buildings in Soho and was the architect of the original Grand Central Depot.

Lombardi, whose restorations and conversions often include more