



THE PARK PLACE OF LAWYERS' ROW

What do you do if you're one of the most prominent law firms in town and a historic courthouse is sitting vacant? You redesign it as one of the most beautifully modern office spaces in the state, move in, then brag just a little.

"This project restored Rodney Square to the center of town," says Richard A. Levine, a partner at Young, Conaway, Stargatt, & Taylor LLP. "That's not why we did it, but it was a reason."

The neo-classically styled Daniel L. Herrmann Courthouse on North King Street in Wilmington, bought by MBNA when the new New Castle County Courthouse opened a few years ago, had sat empty for nine years. The Pettinaro company bought the building for a bargain-basement price in 2009, intending to build a new high-rise onto it. A soft market forced the company to go on the hunt for a tenant. YCST jumped at the chance to move there.

"There's a special relationship between lawyers and courthouses that you can't define, but you can intuit," Levine says.

A \$40 million transformation by Francis Cauffman of Philadelphia turned the 96-year-old building into a shining example of contemporary design. The historic staircases—brass rails and marble risers—still spiral to the upper floors, but the space is otherwise newly filled with sleek glass partitions, marble floors and tabletops, and exotic wooden office doors and cabinets. A light palette, lots of space—more than 210,000 square feet—and dozens of large windows create a bright, airy, feeling and sense of tranquility that belies the important work done there.

The building houses offices for 120 lawyers, as many staff, a suite

for visiting counsel, a moot courtroom with state-of-the-art recording technology, a cavernous library and filing spaces, several large conference rooms and a beautifully landscaped courtyard where the firm hosts cocktail parties, barbecues and other social events for the team. Best of all for YCST, there's room to expand.

Levine, who has overseen three moves in his 41 years with the firm, calls it an important urban renewal project done with all-private funding—and something more.

"Really and truly, this has been a dream-come-true for a law firm to end up in a courthouse. There are a few in the country, but mostly in small towns, nothing on this scale."