

# Amped Up

## Historic Restoration and Addition Offer Innovative Urban Living

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Historic photo of the Patterson House, showing the previous addition at right.

Courtesy of Hartman-Cox Architects



New addition to the Patterson House

Photo © Anice Hoachlander / Hoachlander Davis Photography

The Ampeer Dupont Circle, consisting of the renovated Patterson House at left and the new addition at right.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander / Hoachlander Davis Photography

When completed in 1903, the Patterson House overlooking Dupont Circle was emblematic of Gilded Age Washington. With its ample foyer, majestic main staircase, and opulent ballroom, the house was as much an entertainment venue as a private residence. The mansion's architect, Stanford White, of McKim, Mead & White, regularly designed for—and socialized with—some of the richest families in America.

The client, Robert Wilson Patterson, Jr., was editor-in-chief of the *Chicago Tribune* and president of the newspaper's parent company. He was one of the numerous prominent businessmen who commissioned houses in Washington in order to enjoy the city's

flourishing upper-class social life around the turn of the 20th century. After Robert's death in 1910, the mansion passed to his daughter, Eleanor "Cissy" Patterson, who went on to become editor and publisher of the *Washington Times-Herald*. Fiery and scandal prone, Cissy was herself often the subject of sensational news stories, such as when her estranged husband, a Polish count, kidnapped their child. When Cissy died in 1948, she bequeathed the mansion to the American Red Cross, which later sold it to the Washington Club, a women's social organization.

Faced with an aging membership, the Washington Club put the building up for sale in 2014. Preservationists worried that a

new owner might chop up the mansion's grand interior spaces or remove architectural elements and sell them. Fortunately, the club found a buyer who was interested not only in restoring the building's historic fabric, but also in creating a rather unusual hybrid: a mix between an apartment building, a hotel, and a social club in which the mansion's most important rooms would continue to function much as they did during the Pattersons' time.

Dubbed Ampeer Dupont Circle, the project was the brainchild of B.F. "Frank" Saul, III, a scion of the local Saul real estate dynasty. It was co-developed by his new firm, Saul Urban, and Rooney Properties. The development combines small but fully furnished

studio apartments with lavish shared spaces where tenants may work, eat, or mingle with other residents. The project offers activities and programs intended to encourage a healthy work-life balance in a walkable neighborhood where residents can take full advantage of urban living, including opportunities to get to know their neighbors.

The Patterson House property was perhaps uniquely suited to such a hybrid residential development. The original entertaining areas in the mansion were readily convertible into gathering spaces for tenants, while the former bedrooms and servants' quarters on upper levels could be reconfigured into a small number of individual apartments. Just to the east of the original mansion,





Renovated foyer of the Patterson House, with the main staircase at right.

Photo © Gordon Beall



The library now serves as a quiet workspace for Ampeer residents.

Photo © Gordon Beall



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We used a [polymer-based] consolidator to repair the weathered marble surfaces.” As a result of this gentle restoration strategy, the building now seems tidy and solid while avoiding the stark appearance that can result from overly aggressive renovations—it wears its minor flaws with dignity.

The mansion’s principal interior spaces were simultaneously restored and dramatically updated. Original moldings, floors, and other architectural features, which were generally in good condition, were retained wherever possible and repaired or infilled as necessary. Yet these spaces now feel utterly *au courant* thanks to a striking mix of modern and traditional furniture, artworks, and light fixtures.

The foyer features a large, abstract painting that reinforces the black-and-white color palette established on the exterior. From there, the grand staircase leads to a spacious hall on the second floor that opens to all of the main communal spaces. The former ballroom at the rear of the house now includes a bar that hosts happy hours for residents five nights a week. The space is also used for lectures, meetings, and other events. Facing Dupont Circle is the library, which is now a quiet workspace with sleek desks and appropriate electronic connection points. On the other side of the hall is the dining room/kitchen,

where breakfast is served each weekday morning. The other levels of the original house contain 22 of the complex’s total of 92 apartments.

The rest of the apartments are in the addition, a minimalist structure with a milky-white glass curtain wall. It is separated from the main house by a smaller, dark-glass “hyphen” that deliberately fades from view. Although it is somewhat taller than both the Patterson House and the historic Boardman House—now the Iraqi Chancery—immediately east of the site, the addition manages to seem deferential to both. “We didn’t want to compete with the mansions on either side,” said Davidson. “We wanted to keep the addition white, to relate to the Patterson House, and simple, so it wouldn’t take on a ‘third mansion’ character.”

Despite the addition’s unabashedly modern aesthetic, its design alludes to the original building in several subtle ways. The proportions of the windows, for instance, are similar to those on the main floor of the mansion, and they are grouped in sets of three, just as they are on the P Street wing of the historic house. The cleverest reference, though, is the incorporation of glass panels that were photographically imprinted with marble-like patterns, which recall the mansion’s distinctive variegated marble panels. Meanwhile, a narrow band of

Left: The hall at the top of the main staircase. The entry to the library is visible in the left background, while the entry to the ballroom is to the right.

greenish glass at the top of the addition was inspired by the patinated copper gutters on the historic building.

The apartments in the addition, while compact, feel bright and airy thanks to large windows overlooking either P Street or the courtyard between the old and new structures. The units are linked by a single-loaded corridor that runs along the eastern edge of the site, adjacent to the Iraqi Chancery. Because the eastern wall is right on the property line, windows in the corridor are “at risk,” meaning that they might have to be covered up should the Iraqis ever decide to build to the line. For now, however, the corridors receive plenty of natural light, as well.

Now that the Ampeer is operational, it is hard to imagine a more fitting adaptation of the Patterson House. Its stately exterior is intact, and even though it is still not open to the general public, its principal interior spaces may be routinely enjoyed by greater numbers of people than ever before. Meanwhile, the sensitively designed addition provides cozy but pleasant accommodations while adding understated luster to an already elegant block. The resulting complex offers a unique take on urban living.



One of the apartments in the addition.

Photo © Gordon Beall



Renovated ballroom, which is now the site of happy hours and special events for residents. The balcony at the rear is original—it previously accommodated musicians during balls—though the bar below is new.

Courtesy of Hartman-Cox Architects

Historic photo of the ballroom. The two windows at right rear, which were blocked by the earlier addition, were opened up again during the latest renovation.

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