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Old Westinghouse building to be renovated inside and out

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Vesper Property Group is undertaking an \$8 million renovation to 1619 Walnut St., which once housed Brasserie Perrier, as a way to reinvigorate the building and attract new tenants.

Constructed in 1937, the 39,305-square-foot art deco building will get a new glass façade. The street-level portion of the building will have a two-story glass retail showcase that harks back to an era when Walnut was a leading shopping district in the city and buildings looked outward toward the street and potential shoppers. In addition to that, the black granite that now covers the outside of the building will be replaced with large glass windows.

On the interior, all of the building's mechanical systems, including new electrical work, will be replaced along with a total gut job of most of the office space that isn't leased up.

Bohlin Cywinski Jackson of Wilkes-Barre and Wulff Architects of Philadelphia are the architects on the project. Bohlin Cywinski, renowned for many projects, designed the Apple Store on Fifth Avenue in New York and the Liberty Bell Center on Independence Mall. Wulff has completed many corporate

office and commercial projects throughout the region.

While 1619 Walnut was once set to be the site of a new Apple Store in Philadelphia, Center City's first Apple store will be located instead at 1607 Walnut St., a nearby 39,000-square-foot building. In the meantime, 1619 is aiming to add a strong retail tenant to the space and establish a dominant presence along Walnut Street, said Gary Silvi, president of Vesper. The retail portion will serve as the centerpiece of the building and garner top market rents in the range of \$110 to \$125 a square foot.

"We believe — since we have one of the largest storefronts and such a visible presence on the street and [after] completing a full renovation and restoration — that we could command to be in the high-end of the marketplace," Silvi said.

The building at 1619 Walnut has 13,000 square feet of retail space available that also includes basement space with 20-foot ceilings. For 12 years, about 10,000 square feet of the retail space was occupied by well-known restaurant Brasserie Perrier, which was operated by chefs Georges Perrier and Chris Scarduzio. It closed in January 2009.

The remainder of the building is dedicated to office space and 15,300-square-

feet of it is vacant. Claffen Associates, an architecture firm, occupies 1,400 square feet, and Neiman Group, an advertising and public relations firm, recently leased 5,100 square feet. It will be relocating from the 17th floor of One S. Broad St. PernaFrederick Commercial Real Estate represented the landlord while CB Richard Ellis represented Neiman in the lease.

Efforts to lease up the building in full have been tempered by the renovations, particularly the façade work, but once completed they will begin in earnest, Silvi said.

Vesper bought the building in December 2007 from the Girard Estate for \$7.1 million, according to Philadelphia property records. The building was the first Center City acquisition for Vesper, which has previously focused on redevelopment projects in Bucks, Chester and Montgomery counties.

The building was originally occupied by Westinghouse Broadcasting and later KYW-TV. The studio space, which is in the basement, was once used to tape the "Mike Douglas Show," among other notable broadcasts. The renovations are scheduled to be completed by September.



BOHLIN CYWINSKI JACKSON/WULFF ARCHITECTS

Rendering of the new façade.

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