



## Stories to Tell

REAL ESTATE // JUDITH A. STOCK // JUNE 2014



### CHURCH & STATE BISTRO

#### Los Angeles

“This building was an old factory for Nabisco, the National Biscuit Company—so that was special to me because they created food there, and that is what we are doing at Church & State Bistro,” says Yassmin Sarmadi, proprietor of the French bistro that opened in 2008, nestled into the arts district of downtown Los Angeles.

It was a floor-to-ceiling project for the building constructed in 1925: Brick flooring from the old biscuit company’s loading dock was laid down as the foundation of Church & State, while bricks from elsewhere in the building were used to extend the storefront and construct the outdoor patio.

The remodel came with a price tag of \$832,000 as well as some rare accommodations. Even before Church & State began its renovation, the building’s developer had already completed structural retrofitting in 2006, making way for several floors of loft units that reside above the restaurant. This structural backbone made the kitchen hood impossible to vent normally through interior air ducts, so the restaurant installed a new vent system, along with an HVAC unit.

“The building was a blank slate,” Sarmadi says. “We were able to build the restaurant out while maintaining the integrity and history of the building.”

This gave Sarmadi the freedom to design the interior with a decidedly French touch: chairs with rounded wooden backs, food and drink specials scribbled in chalk around the interior, and tables positioned in cozy proximity to each other to foster a community feel.

Despite the hefty price of renovation, the restaurant is just as the owners had hoped. Sarmadi says she has a fondness for old buildings, which come with a warm aesthetic built-in.

“The history of the building evokes conversation as people want to know where they are— especially in a town like Los Angeles, where there isn’t that much history,” Sarmadi explains. “It gives the service staff, and certainly me, the opportunity to have a conversation with people, to tell them where we are, why we’re here, that the floor they are sitting on was laid down in 1925, that the mirror they are looking at was the bay of the loading dock.”