



THEN

NOW

CYPRESS : 167 EAST BAY STREET

T.J. Parsell, who owns Cypress, Blossom, and Magnolia's, grew up in Charleston and as a boy watched this section of East Bay Street languish. "In the 1970s, East Bay Street from Market to Broad was just not a nice part of town. There was some retail there but nothing like what's there today." Many buildings steadily deteriorated for much of the twentieth century. Then in 1989, Hurricane Hugo delivered the coup de grace.

"Hugo destroyed a lot of those buildings," says Parsell. "The first floors were wiped out by flooding. There was a lot of devastation." But devastation led to a renaissance of the area. "People now had the opportunity to come in and buy these properties and redo them. My father purchased the Magnolias building in 1989, and Cypress in 1998."

The Cypress building dates from 1835. The Medical Society of South Carolina owned it for decades, followed later by Melchers & Company, wholesale grocers and dealers in Carolina rice. In the 1940s, it housed a wholesale liquor store, then a furniture warehouse. In the 1950s and '60s, a marine products business operated here, then for the next few decades, shops and offices. Finally came the much-needed overhaul of the Cypress renovation. "We basically demoed the inside of the building but left the original columns and repointed the brick. We worked with the Board of Architectural Review and with Historic Charleston Foundation to maintain the integrity of the architecture while creating a very modern interior space. It's a marriage of the old and the new."

Parsell was a history major and Civil War buff, so he was understandably delighted during the renovation to discover a hole in the ceiling attributed to a cannonball. "I can tell you exactly where it is, but now it's covered up with a false ceiling. We tried to figure out a way to showcase it, but the architect overruled me."



TOP:
EAST BAY STREET LOOKING SOUTH.
COURTESY VALENTINE RICHMOND
HISTORY CENTER'S COOK COLLECTION