

S I L O P O I N T

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When it was completed in 1923, the grain elevator in Baltimore's Locust Point neighborhood was the largest and fastest in the world, every year conveying 3.8 million bushels of grain from railcars to transatlantic cargo ships. By 2003, however, the facility had become a dilapidated nuisance to owner Archer Daniels Midland. But developer Patrick Turner and architect Chris Pfaeffle of Baltimore firm Parameter saw potential in the structure. "Looking at it, I thought, tall, long, thin- residential would be interesting," said Pfaeffle. It was also a 300-foot-tall building on the water in an area zoned for low-rise residential and industrial uses. "The developer and myself, we love old buildings," continued Pfaeffle. "We really wanted to keep it because it was a great building, but it would have been impossible to build anything new that tall in this neighborhood."

Repurposing the one-time grain plate for residential use while maintaining its industrial aesthetic required both surgical and wholesale interventions. Most of the 23-story tower, with its traditional loft-style layouts and 14-by-14-foot windows was cinch, but the top six stories-where the grain scales once lived- were enclosed in a corrugated iron box frame with steel tonnage designed to support cranes, not the load of floors. Parameter demolished and completely reframed this portion of the building with a new steel structure positioned in the existing concrete column grid. Since the existing structure wasn't completely plumb, much of the new steel had to be fabricated on site, assembled in sections on the ground and then craned up to the top and bolted in place. For cladding, the architects replicated the existing façade, except at the top two stores, which comprise of an all-glass penthouse.

Adjacent to the tower portion was a 130-foot-tall silo farm, each silo a hermetically sealed concrete bunker. Fitting residential spaces into this portion proved too difficult, so the architects demolished most of it. In the center of the space they erected a 540 car parking garage wrapped with new glass-clad residential spaces, all built upon existing foundation. Silos were left in place at the corners, as well as in a row separating the garage from the tower, where Parameter inserted linking bridges. "You can walk through the silos," said Pfaeffle, "and look 100 feet up and 30 feet down - a space once would have killed you."

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