



Haril A. Pandya

EDITORS' NOTE Haril A. Pandya is a Principal at CBT and has 25 years of professional experience in corporate office, hospitality, mixed-use, and retail projects. He leads the firm's booming Asset Strategy & Repositioning group that has grown nearly 600 percent over the past couple of years. Haril is also a driver in CBT's social and digital media, brand graphics, and motion design capabilities via CBT's own Media Co-LAB. He is a recipient of the AIA's Young Architects Award and has been named to Building Design + Construction's "40 under 40" and Banker & Tradesman's "New Leaders" lists. He served on the Boston Society of Architects' Board of Directors and the Boston Center for the Arts Board of Directors, as a thesis advisor for the Master of Interior Design program at Suffolk, and as a visiting critic at the Boston Architectural College. He received his Bachelors of Building Science and a Bachelors of Architecture from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Most recently, Haril has given a TEDx talk about the evolution of buildings, the workplace and generational impacts that will eliminate the much sought after corner office.

FIRM BRIEF CBT (cbtarchitects.com) is a 48-year old firm working nationally and internationally on projects that range from urban master planning to large-scale mixed-use developments, multi-family residential, hospitality interiors, corporate workplace, civic, and academic projects. Headquartered in Boston, they have approximately 220 architects, urban planners, interior designers, and support personnel working together to deliver unique solutions that respond directly to client needs. In nearly 50 years of practice, CBT has played an important role in a broad range of projects in diverse settings.

What has made CBT so effective and what has been the secret to its success?

We are a multi-sector or multi-practice area firm. Whether a project is a mixed-use high-rise, hospitality, academic, life science, or civic (components that are often separate and individualized offerings at some larger firms) CBT is really

Providing Value-Add for Buildings

An Interview with Haril A. Pandya, AIA, Principal, CBT Architects

focused on the cross-pollination of information, expertise, and resources allowing us to internally crowdsource the best ideas as a result of working in a true cross-sectoral multidisciplinary setup.

For example, if we're doing a high-rise or adaptive reuse project, I tend to bring in our urban design team, our workplace group, and our interior designers and we'll come up with ideas together. It's about pulling the best and brightest for the job throughout the entire office to come together regardless of the practice area. We do that frequently. That cross talk is one of the biggest differentiators we are providing, and it creates more of a unique global resource, micro-boutique level service platform.

What is the focus of your group within the firm?

Our group is called the Asset Strategy & Repositioning group. We have been doing repositioning, adaptive reuse, and conversion/upgrade projects for almost a decade, but over the past half decade, we have been finessing our pitch or offering to where it's a deep dive into providing building owners with the best value-add for buildings. Major cities all have wonderful old buildings with great bones – there is plenty of this product. Coming up with an offering that is solely focused on the betterment, evolution, and market relevance of a building or portfolio is what we focus on. It's about providing the highest and best use of a blank site, or a conversion from residence to office or office to residence, or warehouse to office, or looking at high-profile Class-A buildings that are simply outdated and not relevant, or turning Class B and C buildings into B+/A offerings and finding ways to make them competitive in the market.

Would you talk as well about the focus around campuses and what you do there?

We have several large suburban campus projects. Particularly in the 1990s, there was a lot of older product out there, much of which were properties with two to six buildings together in a suburban office park or as part of a much bigger office park, that were surrounded by a landscape that was well-mowed and well-maintained, but not active.

We can't build the same identity or brand that we could, for example, in an iconic tower in a downtown setting, so the campus has to be branded to create more of a community feel. When we look at suburban markets like Burlington, Massachusetts, we find that these campuses can transform their identity where the sense of office

is extended to the outdoors – there becomes more of a lifestyle component incorporating live/work/play. We can create something more destination-based because we can include multiple elements.

How challenging is it to reposition existing buildings to be competitive?

If we're working on repositioning an existing building that was a good financial acquisition deal from a cost standpoint, there can be more room to provide a substantive economic injection and elevate it than if we were working with a similar product that is more competitively priced or overpriced.

We still have to cater to a market share that is rent conscious and has established itself in an urban location that is key to their brand. But, there is also the generational element – when we add young people into the equation. They won't mind the old building vibe as long as it has new flair.

There are large companies that want that tremendous glass and steel branded building to represent them, but that doesn't represent the lion's share of the workforce. So there will be a good demand economically, generationally, and value-wise in terms of what's available or will be coming online soon. Value-add properties make a ton of sense. Now, more than ever, people are seeing the benefit this creates.

CBT has been very focused on social media and brand graphics. Would you talk about how important this has been?

We've created what we're calling a "Co-LAB," which is a collaborative consortium of physical modeling, graphic design, branding, and the 3D imagery and motion. We're adding in a virtual reality element, not necessarily through apps but through technology. We're doing hologram work, interesting motion studies, and daylight/sunlight analysis for clients, because those things are important for people who need to know what they're getting. We leverage this service in-house because the second somebody has to go elsewhere for something like this, it feels like it's detached from the process.

Not a lot of firms have this option in-house so we're leading the way not only because of how we use it for clients but because we're also using it to better CBT's brand. This is important because every time we can showcase CBT's additional capabilities in technology, community, philanthropy, leadership, and awards that aren't always project related, this is where the social stuff comes in, and we can leverage what we can do as designers in a creative, rich community. ●