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## CITYSPACE

### In Front of the Eight Ball



**PRESERVATION HUSTLE:** This home at 5147 Wayne Ave. helps prove that old houses can be saved one at a time.

### Lessons from billiards apply to historic preservation.

*by John Andrew Gallery*

I've realized that shooting pool and historic preservation have a lot in common.

After the break, when the balls are scattered all over the table, it's a pretty intimidating sight. Stripes and solids are so mixed up together that the idea of being able to sink all of my seven balls, as well as the eight ball, is a pretty daunting prospect. I know I should have a strategy to help me run the table, but I'm not that good yet. So like many novices, I just shoot one ball at a time, hoping that the cue ball will end up some place where I'll have another shot. Historic preservation is much of the same.

When I look out over the City of Philadelphia and see the thousands of houses, hundreds of churches and the myriad of historic commercial buildings in need of repair, I lose hope in ever finding the resources -- or the right strategy -- to take care of them all. So I'm learning, like in pool, to preserve them one at a time. It makes me grateful for the many small preservation projects that people achieve.

One good example of this is a project that received an award from the Preservation Alliance this month. It is a Germantown transitional housing project called Dignity III: Better Options for Self-Sufficiency, which was developed by the Committee for Dignity and Fairness for the Homeless House Development Inc., a nonprofit housing developer. This project consists of three handsome, formerly vacant historic buildings on Pulaski Street, Wayne Avenue and West Hansberry Street that were faithfully restored to provide housing for families in transition from homelessness to eventual homeownership.

Their restoration was achieved by combining the financial benefits of historic-preservation tax credits with low-income housing funding. The committee didn't try to take on a whole neighborhood, just a few houses. Across the city, there are also many nonprofit organizations, small contractors/developers and individuals buying one or two properties for investment who are accomplishing similar achievements with historic properties. Consistently taken, small actions can lead to big results, just like taking my pool balls one at a time may eventually help me clear the table.

A second lesson I've learned is that you can't sink every ball by simply whacking it hard head-on. Some shots need finesse. In pool, that calls for spin, which may take an ordinary shot and make it creative by not only sinking the desired ball, but leaving the cue ball in a good spot. All historic preservation projects require some spin; none are easy and straightforward. And some require a lot more creativity than others.

One example of creativity is the Philadelphia Housing Authority's rehabilitation of the Suffolk Manor Apartments at 1414 Clearview St., also one of the Preservation Alliance's award winners. The restoration was done very well from a preservation point of view, but it was even more creative in terms of the legal and financing structure that PHA used. It raised \$13 million of the total \$24 million project cost through the sale of low-income and historic-preservation investment tax credits.

Lastly and perhaps the most important lesson that pool has taught me about preservation is patience. There's not much I can do when my opponent is consistently sinking all his balls; no amount of fretting on my part will make him miss. I have to just wait, patiently, for my turn. Even the best players, I've found, occasionally miss a shot and give me another chance. If I'm patient with myself -- taking those balls one at a time -- I often find my patience rewarded and I'm the one who gets the first shot at the eight.

Patience is a key ingredient in historic preservation. The best example of that right now is the Victory Building at Seventh and Chestnut streets, which has been vacant for about 30 years. The building, you might say, waited patiently




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Buildings like the Victory Building were so solidly built that with a modest effort they can stand for decades, waiting for the right circumstances to

be returned to historic properties as long as we can. With patience, their moment will eventually come.

*John Andrew Gallery is executive director of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. He welcomes your comments and your pool tips.*

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