

Western Building lands first tenant and backing from Benaroya

by Marc Stiles on 2/5/14



A Seattle company that develops 21st-century technology products is moving into an early 20th-century building that not too long ago was on the verge of being torn down.

Artefact has leased the top two floors of the Western Building, the 104-year-old Pioneer Square warehouse that until three years ago housed art studios.

After millions of dollars of work — some funded by the state and the rest financed by the **Benaroya Cos.**, of Bellevue — the building’s duckling-to-swan metamorphosis is taking shape. What once was a building in severe structural distress today seems a stout structure that in a few years will have unobstructed views of Elliott Bay and the Olympic Mountains.

The Western Building’s floor-to-ceiling wall cracks and sloping floors have been repaired. Crews from Bellevue-based general contractor GLY used 50-ton jacks to raise the building, which has 252 new micro-pilings stabilizing the foundation. Two Seattle companies, engineering firm Coughlin Porter Lundeen and Ron Wright & Associates/Architects, designed the makeover.

What’s left is the raw, exposed-brick-and-beam character that tech firms and other creative companies crave.

“The building itself just captivated us when we first saw it,” said Dawn Bernhardt, head of operations for 7-year-old Artefact, which hopes to move from Seattle’s South Lake Union to Pioneer Square by the end of this year.

Seattle real estate broker Stan Piha markets the Western’s 75,000 square feet space for lease. He said he is “very close to potentially having one tenant” for floors two, three and four.

This is not surprising, given not only the soulful character of the office space but its location in Pioneer Square. Only about 6 percent of the Class A office space is available for lease, according to commercial real estate services company Jones Lang LaSalle.