

New Life for Lipsitz (Part One)

Written by Mark Shaffer

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Lowcountry Weekly spotlights the rebirth of a downtown icon. By Mark Shaffer



For more than a century the sprawling, wooden structure at Bay and West Streets served as the cornerstone of commerce in downtown Beaufort. Built in 1883, it was the town's largest timber structure. In 1902 the Lipsitz family opened a department store and grocery on the ground floor. The family lived above the business. Three generations of Lipsitz lived and worked on Bay Street.

By the middle of the last century the building was in dire need of modernization. In 1950 the store added a shoe department and underwent a major renovation. The building remained largely unchanged until the family closed the business in 2010, ending a truly historic run and creating a massive vacuum in a downtown already struggling with hard economic times.



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Efforts were made to find a buyer or a tenant for the building. Mast General Store was reportedly approached about the property. Mast seemed a perfect fit, particularly in the wake of its recent success in helping to revitalize downtown Columbia. But negotiations went nowhere. Lipsitz stood conspicuously empty on its corner until a local entrepreneur took stock of its potential and decided to take a chance. Jeff Bisger was also looking to reclaim his guesthouse which his wife, artist Kimberly Bisger, had converted into a studio. Thus the idea of turning the second floor into studio space was born, eventually becoming [Atelier on Bay](#) .

The Bisgers dove into the massive renovation project with a passion and all of Bay Street watched



the transformation. Kimberly Bisger describes the process: "Vinyl siding hid most of the windows," she writes. "Now uncovered, they flood light into our artist's studios. The walls, doors and windows are mostly as they had been. You can see remnants of vinyl flooring and where the lone wall was removed in the front foyer by evidence of its path on the floor. Old department store cases are used to display artist's work and one holds our bar for special events...we found newspapers from the 1940s, phone books and ledgers from the 1950s through 1970s. Shoes were falling out of the ceiling and a secret safe was found in the floor (under the floorboards of Studio 4)."

Today Lipsitz is once again a vital part of the Bay Street economy with three diverse and successful components. Over the next two issues we'll take a special look at the people and businesses breathing new life into Lipsitz.

[We begin with Atelier on Bay.](#)