



Silos Salvaged for 'Quaker Hilton'



Silos built by the Quaker Oats Co. in the 1880s were transformed into the "Quaker Hilton" 100 years later. Other photos show the project during various stages of construction, starting with a view of silos when they were in use.

In 1970, when the Quaker Oats Co. packed up its headquarters in Akron, Ohio, and resettled in Chicago, the run-down factories and grain silos it left behind were likely candidates for the wrecking ball. But that was before an enterprising group of developers, led primarily by Akron architects Ted Curtis and Harold Rasmussen, stepped into the picture.

Now the one-time eyesore in the heart of the city is playing a major role in the revitalization of Akron's downtown. Today it is known as "Quaker Square," a block-long cluster of shops, offices, restaurants and the *piece de resistance*: the country's only hotel built inside an array of grain silos, dubbed the Oatmeal Hilton by locals.

The project got off to a shaky start in 1972 after Curtis and Rasmussen purchased the 2.8-acre site (including six brick factories, more than 100 deteriorated silos, and all the equipment Quaker left behind) for \$325,000. They even had to sell the scrap iron and copper to help with their cash flow. By the mid-Seventies, a few retail shops had opened, but much remained to be done. Then the Hilton hotel chain expressed interest in the hotel-in-a-silo concept, and things began to look up.

The silo recycling began in November 1979. Forty-five smaller silos were torn down to make room for the lobby, ballroom and conference rooms. Thirty-six others, each 24 feet in diameter and 120 feet tall, had concrete floors poured and were transformed into 144 hotel rooms on eight levels, while another silo was turned into an elevator shaft. Using diamond-tipped saws, workers cut two-ton curved slabs from the silo's seven-inch-thick reinforced walls, providing the openings for balconies in each room. (The slabs were later recycled as recessed seating in the cocktail lounge.)

Then there were the headaches that accompany any rehab project of this scope. In this case, gaping holes dotted the floors and ceilings where grain chutes used to be, and the musty smell of wet grain pervaded the structure.

The hotel, which was completed in 1980 at a cost of about \$8 million, is one of Akron's finest. The rooms not only are round, but they are said to be 50 percent larger than the average hotel room. And downstairs, in one of the hotel restaurants, the breakfast menu lists oatmeal—"Quaker only."



Upper left photo courtesy of Curtis & Rasmussen Architects of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio; other photos by Bruce Ford of the Akron Department of Planning & Urban Development. Special thanks to Louise Morris, department librarian, for providing the information on which this article is based.