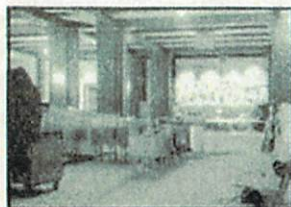




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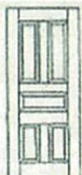
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## Sponge Jet Blasting Helps Preserve Historic Newbury Street Building

By Jack Innis

Boston, MA - Newbury Street is both a historic district and an exciting mixed use commercial district. Called "Rodeo Drive of the East," the eight blocks that make up the heart of the district comprise a wide variety of businesses: clothiers, restaurants, night clubs, specialty shops, beauty services, art galleries, residential and more.



Innis

Although this cultural center rivals those of London, Paris, and San Francisco, much of its ambience is attributable to its historic architecture. The district originated in 1857 by filling in a two-mile-long stretch of Boston Harbor. Newbury Street began as a prestigious and exclusive residential neighborhood of row houses that utilized the best European design elements, including wide boulevards, grid patterns and parkways, according to Newbury Street historian Patrick Quinn.

Now, it's one of the region's shining stars.

Recently, one turn-of-the-century brick building known as 157 Newbury St. experienced a problem that raised eyebrows among the area's users and service providers. The four story building was widely known for a 50- by 50-foot mural that completely covered one of its walls. But the 40-year-old fresco depicting life in the late 1800s had finally faded and peeled to the point that it was considered by many an eyesore.

The decision was made to return the brick wall to its original turn-of-the-century appearance.

Brisk Waterproofing Co. Inc., a 90-year-old organization with offices in Massachusetts, landed the contract to remove the existing fresco, perform brick replacement as necessary, complete tuck-point repairs, and coat the 2,500 square foot surface with waterproofing. The project was mostly aesthetic in nature — to bring the building back into architectural compatibility with the rest of the neighborhood — but would also help protect the brick wall from erosion.

Brisk branch manager Shane Crowe knew the job would present challenges, yet was excited at the prospect of returning this important piece of Boston history to its former glory. He didn't know the project would lead him to learn a technologically advanced solution to an otherwise nearly impossible task.

Most building owners, developers, engineers, architects and facility managers agree; a major challenge in restoring and renovating buildings is that the structures often cannot be completely closed to pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Such was the case at 157 Newbury St.

The mural, at the end of a row of buildings, was adjacent to a very busy area. Due to the nature of the restoration, the work was to

be performed during daylight hours meaning that noise, fumes, overspray, and dust were major concerns to businesses, patrons, and the building restoration crew. Although a portion of the parking lot could be closed off to allow for equipment staging, sidewalks and streets below would remain open.

"One of our five-man crews performed the brick renovation over the course of three months in the summer," said Crowe. "We worked Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.; that being driven more than anything else by the fact that Boston is a strong union town and those are union working hours."

After erecting moveable horizontal scaffolding, the Brisk crew examined their options for removing the mural. Pressure washing alone would not remove the paint. Sand blasting, a viable alternative in many instances, could not be used due to environmental concerns.

"In sandblasting, which is typically the least expensive method of removing paint from structures, you create silica dust, and blowing it around in an area with a lot of people is not good," said Crowe. "Also, in terms of worker safety, a condition in the construction industry exists where the guys work a long time and silica dust in their lungs can kill them in the long run. Any time you can mitigate silica dust, you try to."

Brisk also considered a system that combines water and sand together in a high-pressure slurry. While water/sand blasting would have helped control airborne silica dust, it would also create two unacceptable problems: at necessary pressures, water could easily infiltrate the aging mortar, work its way between the bricks, and cause problems for inhabitants on the other side of the wall. In addition, using water would necessitate construction of a water containment collection system to manage contaminated runoff.

To control airborne particles, prevent water infiltration, and keep a lid on noise pollution, Brisk turned to Sponge Jet, a New Hampshire-based company that provides special equipment and abrasive media.

"We're proud to be involved in this historic building preservation," said Sponge Jet Marketing Manager Tony Anni. He explained how this technology works: Conventional abrasives release clouds of airborne dust containing minute particles of abrasives, contaminants, and the coating (when specified) to be removed. But when conventional abrasives are bonded into sponge, the sponge media traps most of what would normally have become airborne dust. Since sponge also absorbs part of the impact of collision, the system also reduces noise produced by the blasting media impacting the brick wall.

"This is important when working on a wall inhabited on the other side," said Crowe. "The waterless system also allows the sponge

*"In sandblasting, which is typically the least expensive method of removing paint from structures, you create silica dust, and blowing it around in an area with a lot of people is not good."*

—Shane Crowe,  
Brisk branch manager

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## High-Profile: RESTORATION/RENOVATION DEVELOPMENT NEWS

### Sponge Jet Blasting Helps Preserve Historic Newbury Street Building

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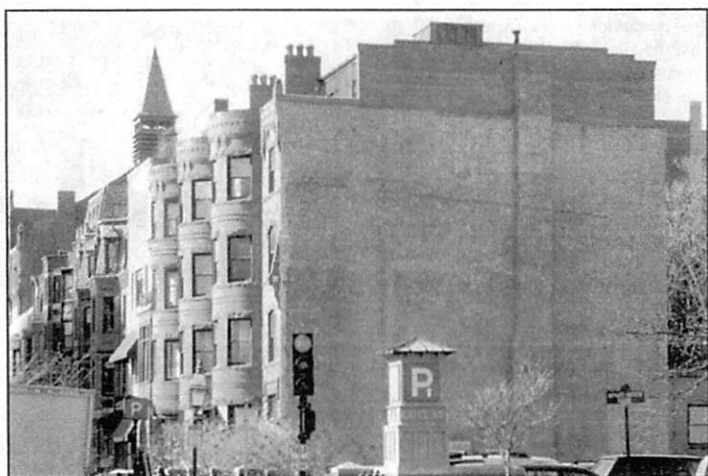
media to be recycled, which can be a positive for the environment and the pocketbook."

Brisk was now able to proceed without a containment system or trying to erect an elaborate tenting system on the side of the four story building to contain dust.

"We closed off part of the parking lot, and were still at times a mere 30 feet from pedestrians," said Crowe. "We pretty much blasted, let gravity take its course and picked up the debris with shovels."

Using a 100-HP Feed Unit, a 70-E Recycler and Silver 30 Sponge Media abrasives, the Brisk crew was also able to maintain the delicate control needed to not damage the surface of the 100-year-old bricks.

"It's important when cleaning or blasting historic masonry structures that the outside 'fire skin' of the brick not be compromised," said Crowe. "Otherwise, the mason-



After erecting a moveable horizontal scaffolding, the Brisk crew used Sponge Jet blasting technology to successfully remove the mural without damaging the historic brickwork or showering pedestrians and cars with debris.

ry will not hold up to the elements as well and may fail prematurely."

Crowe noted that his crew's rate of production was roughly equal to that of conventional abrasive blasting.

Although Sponge Jet bonded media is priced higher than sand, it makes applications such as renovating 157 Newbury St. possible and in some instances works out to be among the least expensive alternatives. "In any resto-

vation project that involves abrasive blasting, it is important to consider all potential costs," said Anni.

Above and beyond the price of the raw blast media, Brisk considered costs associated with creating dust containment systems, potentially paying overtime for night work, and containing and disposing of contaminated water.

"When you find yourself in a situation where you need to do blasting but need to control the dust and are concerned about safety and the environment, it's useful to know there's machinery that can do the job," said Crowe.

Brisk completed the project by replacing missing bricks and performing pointing — which Crowe described as removing mortar between bricks and installing new mortar. "Mortar is characteristically removed until sound mortar is found," he said. "It could be anywhere from 3/4 inch to four inches. On this job, only about an inch of mortar needed to be removed."

With application of a coat of a clear penetrating sealer, remediation and renovation of 157 Newbury St. was complete.

The project erased visual blight, made the building more compatible with surrounding structures, and helped protect the structure from the elements. The prognosis is good that 157 Newbury St. will continue to function as an important part of "Rodeo Drive of the East."

Jack Innis has written articles on coatings and coatings removal for building development and remediation trade publications for more than four years. He is a NACE-certified level one coatings inspector.



Removing a faded and peeling mural from the side of this historic Boston building presented environmental problems.

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