



case study

Navy Yard at Noisette

Multi-use commercial spaces, corporate offices, cultural and civic activities, and residential buildings.; North Charleston, South Carolina

Workplace Issues:

- Economic Vitality
- Environmental Responsibility
- Social Spaces

Applications:

- Multi-use Commercial Spaces
- Corporate Offices
- Cultural Spaces
- Residential Buildings
- Civic Spaces

Project Scope:

340 acres

Herman Miller Products:

Conviva Programmable Infrastructure



Billed as the New American City, Noisette, a city within a city, is located in North Charleston, South Carolina, and is the focus of the largest urban revitalization effort to date. A public and private partnership between the City of North Charleston and the Noisette Company, the City of Noisette comprises 3,000 acres. It will eventually include residential, recreational, retail, arts and culture, and commercial areas. The master plan was created by the Noisette Company as a road map for the city's future economic development and revitalization. The project's goal is to create a community that is responsive to social needs, economically vital, and environmentally responsible. Noisette's vision, known as the triple bottom line, considered people, planet, and prosperity equally in its master plan.

The Navy Yard at Noisette is considered the "urban heart of the New American City." This 340-acre plot is owned by The Noisette Company, whose CEO is John Knott, a nationally known developer

of environmentally sustainable communities and the visionary behind the Noisette Project. The Noisette Company and Convia, a Herman Miller Company, have partnered as well on revitalization efforts within the Navy Yard. Both companies share the vision of the triple bottom line and are working together to create adaptable and sustainable spaces for a myriad of uses. The Navy Yard was once a thriving shipyard and naval base, but has been closed since 1996. It is filled with both newer and historic buildings. Development of this area will focus on creating the urban hub within the greater Noisette community, including multi-use commercial spaces, corporate offices, cultural and civic activities, and residential buildings.

The goal for the Navy Yard, says Jeff Baxter, Project Manager with the Noisette Company, is to “create a sense of place, belonging, and vitality. We want to show people that an environmentally responsible, community-minded place can also be an economically viable and vibrant place.” And a 21st century city. “We will build a wired, communicative, state-of-the-art city from the infrastructure out.” Convia™ modular and programmable electrical infrastructure is helping to make that goal possible.

One of the initial projects in the redevelopment effort is Building 1655, a 15,000-square-foot metal structure built 10 years ago and located along Storehouse Row in the Navy Yard. Noisette is converting the building into a multi-tenant nonprofit center. It will provide office space for nonprofit organizations, with the goal of creating a synergy of like-minded organizations that will enrich and complement each other’s missions and activities. In addition, a performance space will also be created for small arts-based groups.

The triple bottom line of Noisette and Convia

The Navy Yard redevelopment demonstrates how a triple bottom line approach to development is possible. Does the project meet our goals for an equal balance of people, planet, and prosperity? This is the question that informs Noisette’s evaluation of a project. We ask the same question of Convia. The partnership between the Navy Yard redevelopment and Convia is an example of the alignment between a philosophy and a product.

People



Building 1655 will build community from the inside out and the outside in, nurturing the sense of place that is important to the Noisette vision. A sharing of ideas and synergy among the building residents is Noisette’s goal. From there, activities and ideas expand into the community through the sharing of public areas such as exhibition space and the theater. Building 1655 provides affordable, well-designed, and visible office space for nonprofit organizations, most of whom operate on shoestring budgets. By offering a well-managed, stable, and technology-rich work environment, as well as a visible location, Noisette believes the names and missions of the nonprofit tenants can be advanced. The theater space, while further integrating arts into the community, will provide presentation space for performances and meeting space for tenants and members of the community.

Infrastructure to support the varied uses within the space must be agile and customizable—and affordable. For that reason, Convia was the logical choice for Noisette. “Infrastructure that can accommodate dramatic change does not have to be expensive,” says Jeff Baxter. The programmable modularity of Convia and the local control it offers tenants means that lighting variations and data and electrical appliances can be fine tuned to the particular areas within the building — and changed when needed, without the time and expense of electricians and reconstruction. Churn and change within Building 1655 will be high — intentionally so, as Noisette plans to have a mix of short- and long-term tenants. But while the design of the space is now underway, the building’s future uses and potential tenants are unknown. Building to fit a number of unknowns is a challenge, but Convia’s smart architecture is helping Noisette accommodate those changes even before they happen.

Baxter describes Convia’s benefit this way: “Noisette, as owner of the building, can plan conceptually for how the building will be used, and that is adequate for now. We can offer our tenants a customized environment when they move in without bearing costs for changing the infrastructure to accommodate their specific needs.”

Planet

John Knott is one of the nation's leading developers of environmentally responsible communities, so the environmental requirements that Noisette places on the Navy Yard redevelopment should come as no surprise. Adaptive reuse of existing structures defines sustainability. All redevelopment activities must meet LEED standards.

Both Convia and Herman Miller are members of the Urban Alliance, a group of international businesses known for their environmental values, who are joining with Noisette to help create the New American City. These companies have preferred vendor relationships with contractors and A&D firms redeveloping the Noisette community. The Urban Alliance is a list of who's who in the world of sustainable business practices.

When first introduced to Convia, John Knott saw immediately the environmental benefits of the infrastructure system. From a material standpoint, every Convia component is reusable. From a use standpoint, Knott saw how the structure could retain value over the long term, without ending up obsolete and in the landfill waste stream. "Convia will help us eliminate a lot of waste that's associated with churn in offices and other kinds of buildings," he says. Reducing this landfill waste, says Knott, is a "tremendous environmental benefit." The ability of Convia to support technology, equipment, and placemaking components further decreases the potential for reconfiguration tear-outs and waste as tenants and uses change.

One of the tenants in an already redeveloped building in the Navy Yard is McMillan, Smith, and Partners, an A&D firm, whose offices occupy a 2,250-square-foot space. As building developer, Noisette was committed to installing Convia infrastructure in this office space to showcase the product's capabilities and demonstrate the flexibility of Convia.

"Our objective in redefining the interior space with McMillan was to eliminate a traditional drywall approach and create space division with wall materials supported from the Convia grid," says Baxter. "As building owners, this approach gives us a great deal of flexibility down the road. If McMillan moves out, we won't be left with a significant renovation, tearout, and a whole lot of drywall to send to the landfill. For the A&D firm, we felt it could be an opportunity for them to illustrate creative, forward-thinking interior design possibilities as well as a great showcase for their potential clients." Noisette planners worked with McMillan, Smith, and Partners to eliminate approximately 50 linear feet of traditional drywall that had been part of the initial plan and replace it with other space division materials, primarily soft walls that are hung from the Convia structure. Additionally, if this tenant moves out, the electrical infrastructure will not have to be torn out. Less landfill material will be generated over time.

Prosperity

As a for-profit business, the Noisette Company expects to generate a positive cash flow in its Navy Yard development. But the project is rife with hurdles to posting a positive financial return. Renovating existing buildings versus new construction always poses challenges; buildings are in varying degrees of disrepair as well. Noisette is looking for a diverse tenant base, not targeting only those organizations or businesses which can pay top dollar. This is an important distinction for the Noisette Company. Affordability and diversity of community is essential to its mission. For this reason, renovation costs need to remain in line with potential lease rates.

Convia directly—and positively—impacts Noisette's financial investment and long-term return. The Convia installation has the potential to attract future office tenants due to its unique properties and total flexibility. For the architectural firm, lighting various areas of the office space, from conference rooms to individual work areas, is easy and customizable. It will also provide the firm with a fluid workplace that can change easily, from the programming of lighting scenes to the division of space within the office.

Harry Gordon, an architect and director with Burt Hill, is partnering with Noisette on the community's master planning. "Convia could turn any traditional office, retail, or educational space

into a kind of theater performance space," he says. "We have the potential of doing some dramatic things with Convia that might otherwise be too difficult or expensive to do." The long-term savings Convia offers is the compelling economic benefit for Noisette. "Initially, our costs for Convia may be equal to costs of a traditional electrical system," says Noisette's John Knott. "But our operating cost will be so reduced that it's a huge benefit long term to the builder/developer." Its inherent flexibility makes Convia a sustainable product, retaining its value by adapting to the changing needs of Noisette's tenants.

Knott believes that Noisette's costs will be significantly reduced when they bring in new tenants. "As a building owner, I will be able to increase tenant satisfaction levels within the space, and it seems to me that tenants will be far less likely to leave."

People, Planet and Prosperity

Convia's relationship with Noisette began with an office area now occupied by an A&D firm. This environment will help model how the workplace can be redefined through Convia's modular programmability. The relationship between Noisette and Convia continues with Building 1655, an ambitious undertaking that will provide state-of-the-art, flexible, and sustainable space to nonprofit organizations. The tenant list and potential uses are still undefined, but Convia's potential will be realized as the future unfolds.

The potential of Convia to reveal the potential of space in cost-effective, humane, and environmentally responsible ways is the point at which Noisette's philosophy meets Convia's capabilities.

