

Houston's Real Estate Landscape

Swamplot

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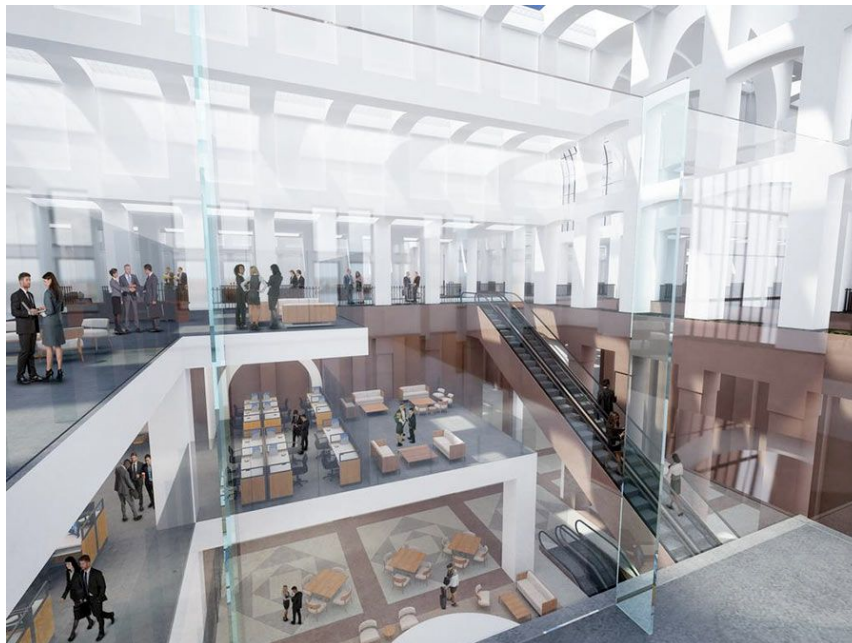
Cubicles, Mezzanines, Great Glass Elevator To Fill Philip Johnson's Grand Downtown Banking Hall Airspace As Part of Renovation



01/02/18 12:30pm

77002, Downtown,
Office Buildings,
Proposed Developments

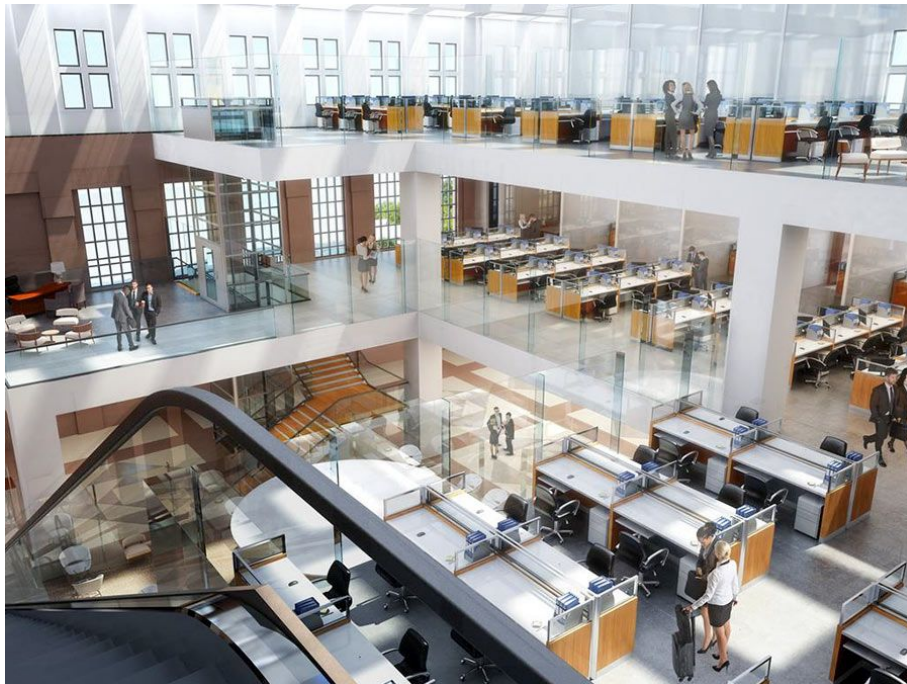
by Dan Singer



QUICK, what's the **most vaulted** bank in all of Houston? Easy: the lofty Bank of America branch on the ground floor of the **Bank of America Center** at 700 Louisiana St. Downtown (pictured at top) — so **grand**, so **postmodern**, so . . . **unleasable**. Philip Johnson designed the **12-story high** banking hall to resemble “a **sixteenth-century Dutch guild hall**, albeit one scaled to be seen from the **freeway** at sixty miles per hour,” writes Joel Warren Barna in a history of the project included in *The See-Through Years*. But now **big changes** are planned for that empty space:

“We’re just going to kind of **slip in these two floor slabs**,” Jeff Sydness of Sydness Architects tells the *Chronicle*’s Katherine Feser. Sydness was hired by M-M Properties to **reconfigure the lower levels** of the 56-floor tower, which was built in 1983. So: **Lower ceilings** ahoy! **New mezzanines** are now being planned to colonize the banking hall’s towering overhead emptiness. The new structures, edged with glass walls, will **fill much of that air-conditioned but unused airspace** with workstation- and cubicle-ready office platforms:

* * *



The rendering above shows the view from the top of the existing escalator, looking south toward the mezzanines (to the right) and the building’s frontage along Louisiana (to the left). A new **glass elevator** on the left and encircling **stairway** drop straight down into the lobby from the added floors above.

Here’s the view from the new 2nd mezzanine level just above and to the south of the building’s Louisiana St. entrance:



Since their construction, the banking hall and tower have been through 3 name changes: first dubbed RepublicBank Center, they then became **NCNB Center**, then **NationsBank Center**, following the successive corporate makeovers of their anchor tenant. Bank of America now plans to **move out** in 2019.

The renovations are expected to start after Bank of America departs. Before they begin, an earlier phase of construction will metabolize the **2-story Western Union building** on the corner of Louisiana and Capitol streets that the Bank of America Center **surrounded** and **swallowed** when it was first constructed. In total, the project is set to add 25,000 sq. ft. of space to the building.

New **2-story windows** are also planned to open up the bank hall's southwest facade. Here they are viewed from the corner of Rusk and Louisiana:



