Prior to the renovation and seismic retrofit of the Desmond Building, independent research had identified The Desmond as one of Los Angeles’ many existing non-ductile, irreparable concrete buildings at risk of collapse during the next major earthquake. The 1994 Northridge Earthquake was a catalyst for the City of Los Angeles to amend its Building Code in 1997 to require retrofits for non-ductile concrete buildings. The 2011 Los Angeles Earthquake retrofit triggers were not exceeded when considering the new story and reconstruction with new building materials. The Desmond’s structural solution was determined and used in computations that guided a close coordination between design disciplines.

This rigorous, code prescriptive retrofit solution enabled the addition of income generating space while preserving the historic character of the century-old Desmond Building. Innovation and rigidity represented a sustainable solution: the carbon footprint of preserving and reusing materials was lower than that of demolition and reconstruction with new building materials. The Desmond structural solution exemplifies how other non-ductile historic properties in Los Angeles can be safely retrofitted for creative use, even including additions. The project went beyond the retrofit triggers by exceeding the 2011 Los Angeles Earthquake triggers and, in turn, the original seismic demands at the Desmond.

The Desmond building was designed in 1916. Originally a car dealership and assembly plant, it then became a retail store and neighborhood hangout. In 1986, the Desmond closed its doors and the building sat empty until acquired by the University of California in 2008 for its expansion into the CAS faculty and student hub. The Desmond building was designed in 1916.

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