

# Project Focus

## 'Work of art' housing project revitalizes downtown streetscape

Architect uses creative thin stone installation to capture downtown Baltimore's eclectic history while delivering a modern and chic affordable housing building.

### Brief History

As cities throughout North America move to rejuvenate neglected cores through intensification, planning affordable housing poses a unique challenge: how to redevelop economically and with an aesthetic that jives with the eclectic nature of historic cores. Having completed a successful and award-winning development in downtown Baltimore already, Fillat+ Architecture and their client, Housing Trust of America, eyed a vacant property for a new affordable apartment complex. Situated at an historic intersection, architect Peter Fillat and his team drew inspiration from a black and white photo that captured a bustling, integrated community.

### Solution

Not wanting this new 71-unit project to look like low-income housing, the team looked for a creative way to reflect the colours and movement depicted in the black and white photograph from the 1950s. In the photo above, you can see the multi-cultural pedestrian traffic crossing in every direction, including diagonally. How could they translate this 'barn dance', this unique vibe of intersecting people and cultures onto the exterior of a modern affordable housing unit? In practicality, this project needed a high-quality exterior that would stand up to Baltimore's four-season climate and meet budget constraints. The added challenge was to actualize these creative objectives as well.





Project: L on Liberty  
Location: Baltimore, MD  
Architect: Fillat+ Architecture  
Product: ARRIS-tile  
Photos: Sam Oberter Photography

#### **How it was solved, design objectives and economic benefits**

When Peter Fillat and his team shared their vision with us, our rep, Michael Beal, quickly suggested that the desired pixelated pattern (from the old photo) could easily be achieved using ARRIS-tile thin stone: different colors of individual stone pieces corresponding to the distinct pattern. ARRIS-tile comes in a 2 ft. x 1 ft. size (23-5/8" x 11-5/8"), which was an ideal format to create this unique pattern. Three standard colors were chosen, to create just the right gradation between the tones.

The installer, Athena Stone (of Rosedale, MD) committed to learning the installation and executed the pattern installation precisely. According to project architect Sergio Martinez, the entire building team, including the GC, Hamel Builders, embraced the design and worked collaboratively to see it come to life. "It did feel like a coming together of trades and resources, which was fitting for this marketplace intersection of the past," remarks Mr. Martinez.

As a thin stone, ARRIS-tile was an economical choice, from both installation and material cost considerations, for this 76,500 GSF apartment building. Being able to use a standard size and incorporate standard colors also saved on costs. The individual tiles installed as a larger graphic, and the incorporation of distinct red brick sections, disguises the fact that this is an apartment building. The final result is more like a work of art, a conversation piece that starts a new and distinct chapter for this revitalized core.