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The Thompson Block wins Greater Portland Landmarks award

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Before preservation -

121 Middle Street, Thompson Block - Portland, ME

After preservation -

121 Middle Street, Thompson Block - Portland, ME

Portland, ME East Brown Cow and The Docent's Collection said that the Thompson Block has won a 2025 Preservation Award from Greater Portland Landmarks. The biannual award recognizes outstanding preservation efforts across the city. The Thompson Block, located at 121 Middle St., is a cornerstone of the city's Old Port and features private lofts on its upper floors as part of the boutique hospitality product, The Docent's Collection.

"We are delighted to be given this honor from Greater Portland Landmarks," said Tim Soley, president at East Brown Cow. "For our team and the trade partners and historians we collaborated with, restoring the Thompson Block was a labor of love. This renovation exemplifies our commitment to adaptive reuse, where historic preservation and forward-thinking development converge to celebrate Portland's past and shape its future."

Designed by architect George Harding and built during the Old Port's resurgence after the Great Fire of 1866, the Thompson Block's unique architectural features include delicate oak leaf motifs that reflect Portland's identity as the "Forest City" and the hope for a new beginning. The building was revitalized by East Brown Cow from 2019-2024, through a meticulous, multi-year renovation. It included the restoration of the slate mansard roof, copper dormer roofs and flashing, brick, sandstone, brownstone, and granite masonry façade, wood detail and trim, and original windows. Several missing elements, such as cast-iron grilles, finials, and scrolls were recreated through a combination of 3D scanning, review of historic photographs and architectural drawings, and surveying of the remaining building fabric.

Today, the Thompson Block is home to both The Docent's Collection on its upper floors, and retail stores on the ground floor including Bliss — an acclaimed Maine business that has been thriving in the Old Port for 20 years — and the global lifestyle brand, Free People.

“The Thompson Block has benefited from a thoughtful revitalization under the stewardship of East Brown Cow,” said Kate Lemos McHale, executive director at Greater Portland Landmarks. “East Brown Cow’s commitment to meticulous preservation and innovative interventions has captured the history and vibrancy of this prominent block in the Old Port for residents, visitors, and downtown workers to enjoy.”

The Docent's Collection fuses the first-class hospitality of a hotel stay with modern, mobile-first service and personalized amenities — and an experience more typically associated with luxury residential rentals. East Brown Cow chose to dedicate the upper floors of the Thompson Block to this programming as a way to support such a high level of institutional renovation.

The Docent's Collection opened at the Thompson Block in 2019. Not long after, the hospitality brand began to receive national acclaim from the likes of Cosmopolitan, Hotels Above Par and JQ List — and consistently strong reviews on TripAdvisor. It expanded with the addition of seven new lofts on the building's fourth floor in 2024, along with additional expansions in other historic buildings throughout the Old Port. Most recently, 16 new lofts opened at the Boyd Block at 178 Middle St. in August — another architectural gem designed by George Harding and restored by East Brown Cow.

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