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The penthouse windows are 18 feet tall in this two-story corner loft, which boasts 26-foot ceilings.

Layers of life

As Meier & Frank's warehouse becomes The Avenue lofts, it's easy to see the building's past in its concrete structure

By **RANDY GRAGG**
THE OREGONIAN

The corner of Northwest 14th Avenue and Hoyt Street is a seven-story archaeology site. The earliest strata were laid in 1923 as the Meier & Frank warehouse. And next summer, the newest layer will be added: The Avenue lofts.

The building's route from storing bedding, clothes and china to housing aging boomers and hip young urbanites is exposed in the concrete of four eras.

Astute motorists passing by the massive building on Interstate 405 no doubt have noticed the most dramatic changes. They began in 2002 when the

creamy colored concrete suddenly was partly painted in charcoal gray. Then, three months ago, all the windows were removed and the building's windowless upper south face suddenly showed enormous, 18-foot-high holes. Soon it will be painted cream again.

But the real action is inside, where developer Robert Ball with Sera Architects,



KPFF Consulting Engineers and Howard S. Wright Construction has been transforming the building into what is arguably the boldest — or at least, the most sturdy — of the many new Pearl District lofts.

Best known as the key sponsor of last year's failed ballot initiative to change Portland's system of government, Ball is becoming one of the city's most adventurous redevelopers of historic properties. He last did the Marshall Wells Lofts, a 1910 railroad warehouse designed by

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The Meier & Frank warehouse was designed by Frederick Fritsch, architect of the Masonic Temple.

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