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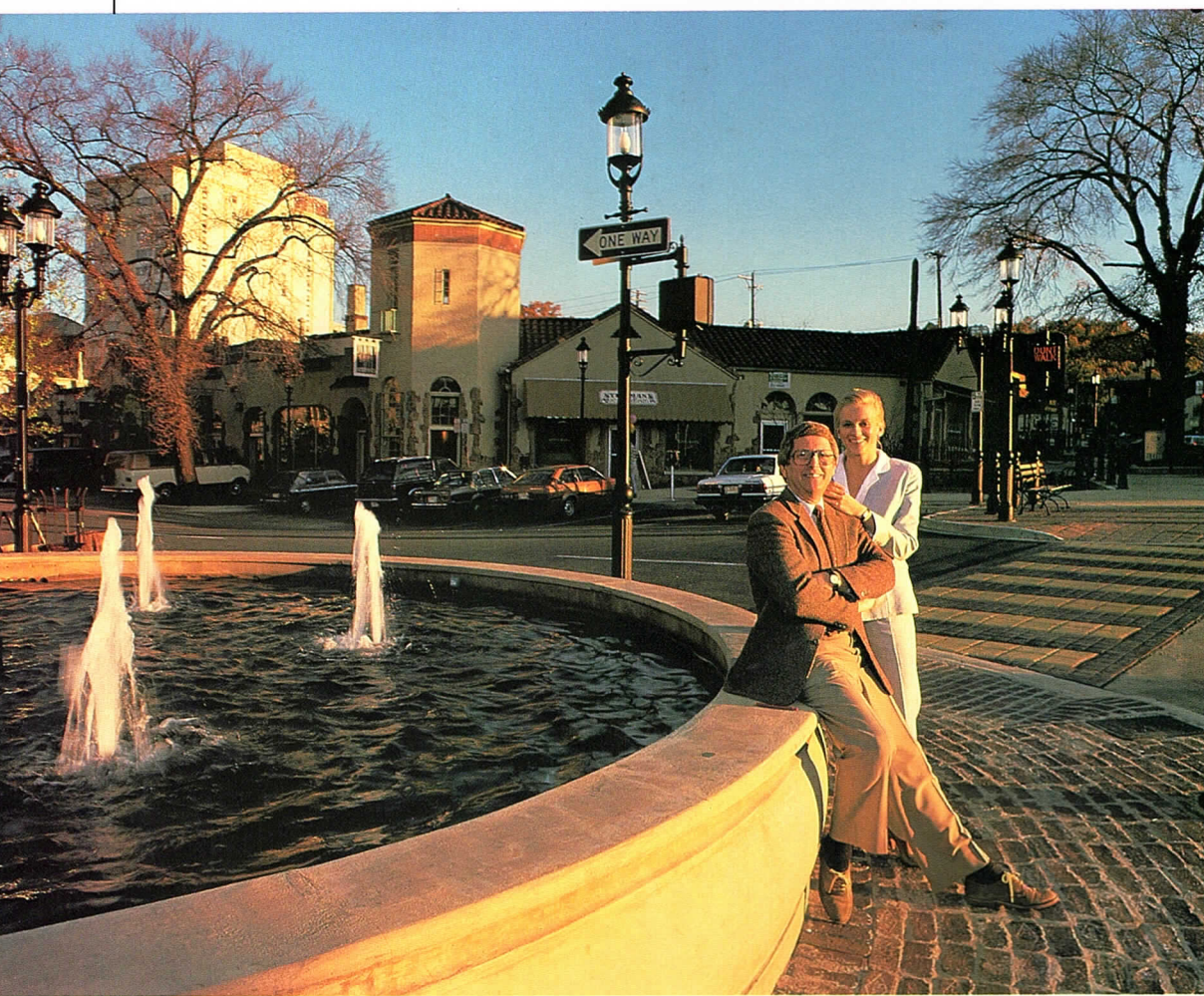
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Bob and Rebecca Moody, left, bought their first Five Points South building piece by piece. "Our idea was to make the place comfortable... a place where 80-year-old people and little kids could all go and feel safe... with an interesting, varied tenant mix," says Bob. Part of that tenant mix includes a colorful ice cream shop (below).

PHOTOS BY SPIDER MARTIN

Being Moody In Five Points South

BY ELLEN SULLIVAN

In Birmingham these days there's a new interest in restoring the original character of city neighborhoods, in making them more livable and workable "people" places.

The most obvious changes, perhaps the most successful so far, have taken place in the historic Five Points South area, where a major revitalization project was completed early in 1983.



Comments from Five Points merchants and residents alike underline the increased livability of the area, where people of all ages can often be seen strolling about, sitting on benches eating ice cream in the parklike atmosphere, or browsing in and out of an increasing number of interesting new shops, galleries and restaurants.

It took a lot of time, effort and money on the part of a lot of people to bring Five Points to life. Bob and Rebecca Moody are happy to be part of it all.

Seven or eight years ago, Bob Moody, an Auburn graduate who once worked as a conceptual artist for Wernher Von Braun, bought "one little sliver" of the Spanish Revival building on 11th Avenue South, across the street from Highlands United Methodist Church. There he opened his now well-established commercial interior design business.

Moody, who travels widely and has designed interiors for a spectrum of businesses around the state, was for many years aware of the possibilities for urban revitalization in Birmingham.

"I always thought that Morris Avenue and Five Points South were two areas with a great deal of potential," he says.

Moody became involved in Morris Avenue development shortly after his move to Birmingham.

"I had great ideas I tried to sell to 63 different owners," he says. "Ultimately, I realized that you have to own a place to really do anything with it."

Thus Moody began buying his building at Five Points, "piece by piece, as it became available. Our idea was to make the place comfortable, not too slick . . . a place where 80-year-old people and little kids could all go and feel safe . . . with an interesting, varied tenant mix."

In the process of achieving that, the Moodys acquired the space next door to Bob's interior design firm and opened an art gallery, now three years old.

The gallery has provided an art resource for Moody's interior design clients, as well as a Southern outlet for the works of artists from all over the country.

"What we do in the firm is really comprehensive design," Moody points out. "We take a vacant space and do everything from space planning to furnishings. That includes the selection of works of art."



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"The Side Show gave us the opportunity to have better access to art through a local gallery, done the way we thought it should be done," says Rebecca, who runs the gallery. "We figured there were already galleries representing local artists well . . . So we're deliberately representing people from all over, in an attempt to bring them into Birmingham. And it's been very successful."

The Moodys have been equally successful at combining their ideas for Five Points with those of others who wished to become involved as merchants.

With the Moodys as landlords, shops as varied as an old-fashioned ice cream parlor, a full-service bicycle shop and a San Francisco-style grill have opened in the 11th Avenue Spanish marketplace.

"It's so important to have the right tenant mix," Moody says. "I learned that on Morris Avenue. Everyone wants to open a bar or restaurant—they see that as something fun to do. But you can't have a neighborhood that's all bars and restaurants. Who's going to run the flower shop? Who's going to run the drugstore? That's where it's a challenge—and a lot of fun—matching the right people with the right businesses."

Ralph Stillman Hare is one of those people. Formerly an engineer, Hare opened his ice cream parlor at Five Points in July.

"People like Bob take much less credit than they deserve for renewal projects like this one," Hare says. "If you didn't have a Bob Moody buying property and taking an interest in tenants, this place wouldn't be what it is."

"He's here every day and on weekends . . . He came up with much of our menu, invented the logo—he did all the hard work," Hare laughs. "You know he was a soda jerk when he was a kid in Boaz."

The parlor, according to Hare, is an old-fashioned ice cream place in that customers are invited to come in and sit down, where they'll receive "real table service, with glasses of water on the tables and ice cream in real dishes."

Hare adds: "The Moodys are living proof that you don't have to be an ogre to be a good landlord, you just have to be attentive. In that respect, Bob may be the profile of the perfect urban renewal landlord. He lets you fix up the place, but not to the point of absurdity. His philosophy is 'spend the time on it, and it'll be there for a long time to come.'"

Other tenants agree. Zeke Candler, former systems analyst and co-owner of Southern Bicycles, says Bob liked the idea of "an attractive bike and bike accessory shop that gives excellent

service. And he's always willing to make suggestions, or come by and help."

"We run over to the Moodys' like we'd run to a good friend—someone we can bounce ideas off of," says Frances Stitt, who with husband Frank owns The Highlands Bar and Grill, an "American grill, with influences from French and Italian cooking."

"The Moodys are very patient people," she says. "They're willing to let things happen as they happen, and not push."

The question might well be asked: Why did Bob and Rebecca Moody decide to do this in Birmingham? Such projects, while needed here, are perhaps easier to get off the ground in other cities, which already have traditions of historical urban renewal.

"To be frank," Bob says, "I did have the opportunity to start all over three or four years ago when my kids finished college. Rebecca and I had just married, and we were going to leave—to make a new start somewhere else."

Rebecca, a Vanderbilt graduate, came to Birmingham originally to work for *Southern Living* magazine.

"But she was from Denver; her family was there; and we had a chance to do some work out there," Bob says. "We did go to Denver and do several jobs, but every time we'd come back we'd say to ourselves: 'Where else can we live in a beautiful old apartment with a roof garden, like the one we have on Highland Avenue?' We decided we had a pretty darn good life here."

As a result of their experiences since then, the Moodys have developed a hard-working, realistic attitude toward urban development.

"You don't speculate any more," Rebecca says.

Bob nods his head. "If you can make the property more valuable, you earn what you get."

That philosophy seems to be paying off for the whole area, as well as for the Moodys, who have other projects in the works. Recently, they purchased the Munger Building, across 20th Street from the Spanish stores at Five Points. They say the Munger is "a beautiful example of Art Deco architecture," which they plan to develop using the tenant-mix approach that seems to be working well across the street.

They're also involved in the renovation of the Saks Building on 19th Street and First Avenue North, and in the Frank Nelson Building next door to the Saks.

As tenant Frances Stitt sums up: "What makes the Moodys really different is their enthusiasm for the whole area, the whole city, not just the buildings they own. They're 100 percent behind what people are trying to do here—their tenants as well as everyone else." **B**