

BEST OF
2007
AWARDS

The Institute for the Study of the Ancient World

PROJECT OF THE YEAR: Interior Fit-Out

An 108-year-old mansion on the Upper East Side of Manhattan has been converted into the newest addition to New York's "Museum Mile" an archaeological exhibition space and post-graduate school for New York University. To house the institutes's artifacts and library collection, the 27,000-sq-ft townhouse at 15 East 84th Street had to undergo extensive renovation, a few additions, and the discovery of a secret chamber.

The Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, when it starts its first term next fall, will house lecture and conference rooms, offices, library, exhibition galleries, and climate-controlled areas for some of the University's more fragile collections.

First and foremost, the work included the restoration and cleaning of the exterior limestone and brick and interior plaster, wood floors, doors, and paneling. E. W. Howell of Woodbury, N.Y., the general contractor on the renovation, oversaw the replacement of the front stone cornice with glass fiber reinforced concrete. To expedite work inside, the team designed a steel support system that allowed the sealing of the interior and the addition of the new cornice completely from the outside.

Inside, the team experimented with different combinations of compound and plaster to speed up plaster setting and painting. Each wood section was analyzed to reduce the cost of renovation, with each room being chemically cleaned, French polished, or totally refinished. Asbestos was discovered throughout the project, a result of the building's 1929 renovation and 1950 conversion to office space, and had to be contained.

The institutes's needs necessitated a re-configuration of the six-story interior space as well, including demolition of room partitions that required additional wood floor-



ing for seamless integration. The task was complicated by a peculiar design that left floors at different levels, connected with steps and ramps, which the team preserved as often as possible.

Furthermore, New York-based Selldorf Architects has redesigned the building to add a free-standing library, enlarge the building's tiny elevator, and extend a magnificent elliptical spiral staircase all the way to the sixth floor. This last task in particular required a creative approach to loading steel into the building due to street traffic limitations and distance from sidewalk that prevented a crane from loading through a temporary opening in the roof.

The library is a four-story steel structure built into a three-story space. The walls where the floors were removed were reinforced with tube steel. The floors of the library were made of gun-metal finish perforated steel. To get all this metal inside, the team considered a gantry crane but deemed it too costly. Instead, a street crane lifted the steel horizontally through the

Key Players

Owner: The Institute of the Study of the Ancient World/Leon Levy Foundation, New York

Architect: Selldorf Architects, New York

General Contractor: E.W. Howell Co., Woodbury, NY

Structural Engineer: Gilsanz Murray, Steficek, New York

Mechanical Engineer: Altieri Sebor Wieber, Norwalk, CT

Exterior Restoration: Deerpath Construction, Union, NJ

Structural Steel: Post Road Iron Works, Greenwich, CT

Miscellaneous/Ornamental Metal: United Iron, Mount Vernon, NY

windows, and, once inside, the pieces were pivoted and chain-fallen into place. To reduce the amount of steel, the team opted to forgo cantilevering the supports off of existing slabs, reengineered the >>

landings, and used hanging rods instead.

The extension of the spiral staircase required a base steel frame, in addition to the internal wood stringers, treads, and risers. A key architectural piece and focal point, the laylight held together with a muntin above the the spiral staircase, was broken during the removal. The team restored the laylight in sections and installed it back on the raised roof.

In order to enlarge the telephone-booth-size elevator, the shaft and and pit were expanded and the bedrock deepened. In addition, crews cut into the surrounding column footings.

The team also erected a new egress stair tower at the back of the building which required steel support for two 15,000-gallon water tanks at the top. To speed up the process, the tower was built and loaded in pre-fabricated ladder sections.

While the overall project was only 27,000 sq ft, the work involved was so multifarious and detailed that up to 110 crew members worked on the site each day. On top of that, the crew discovered several surprises, including an entire secret room behind a false bookshelf door, which the team converted to house risers for the new mechanical, electrical and life safety systems. While E.W. Howell stayed on top of these developments by holding regular update meetings between the owner, architect, and trades, reassessing safety framework needs based on new slab openings and reconfigured shafts, and carefully coordinating each day's schedule for all of the trades, running the project required a healthy dose of improvisation.

On the library's guardrails, for example, the crew installed metal-framed glass panels, but the owner wanted to have the cor-

ners in all glass. To support the corners, the crew hung the panels with regular bicycle brake cable and other parts purchased at a nearby bike shop. With no clear mid-point or "topping out" day, E.W. Howell decided to throw a catered "Midpoint Crunch Lunch", held in the grand Old Reading Room.

But while the midpoint was purely arbitrary, the team had to meet a very specific deadline: April 1, 2007, was the grand opening of the Greek and Roman Sculpture Garden at the nearby Metropolitan Museum of Art, a major event that the institute and the foundation wanted to use to showcase the project. As changes came in from the owner, the crew had to quickly obtain overtime permits - not an easy task on the Upper East Side, home, as the team found out, to some of the most demanding and finicky New Yorkers. <<