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2003 Project of the Year: Restoration

Brooklyn Academy of Music

Restoring the nearly 100-year-old Brooklyn Academy of Music was complicated on so many levels that "it beat the competition hands down," said a jury member.

"It's one of the most complex jobs we've looked at," remarked another jury member. "It was so extensive and involved so many craftsmen."

The \$8.6 million restoration project at 30 Lafayette Ave. involved restoration of the terra-cotta ornamentation, reconstruction of the parapet and cornice (removed for safety reasons almost 50 years ago), replacement of cracked brickwork and lintels, handicapped accessibility, partial roof replacement, refurbishment of stained-glass windows, cleaning of the façade and the addition of an undulating, 130 foot-long glass entrance canopy.

The Brooklyn Academy of Music was completed in 1908 by architects Herts and Tallant, the premier theater architects of the time. Its eclectic Beaux Arts style can be found in other New York City theaters designed by Herts and Tallant including the New Amsterdam Theatre and the Lyceum Theatre. It was designated a landmark in 1978.

Because it is an historic structure subject to New York City Landmark Preservation Commission requirements, the project team had to take special care to repair damaged areas without causing damage to surrounding areas. They had to salvage as much of the original work as possible without leaving any indication that work was done.

"The problems encountered and solved here were unique. It's an amazing project," said a jury member.

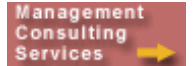
One challenge involved creating one of the four parapets. The main one, situated in the front center of the building, had been missing from the building since the 1950's, when they were removed because of damaged terra cotta and brick. Another challenge involved the highly visible cornice that projects out five feet from the front of the building. This 15-foot-high structure had to be taken down to its steel frame so that corroded steel could be scraped and painted. This required considerable shoring and bracing during the restoration. A replication of the new cornice, as well as parapets with balustrades, was created using glass fiber reinforced concrete. They were then seamed to the refurbished structural steel framing.


Many materials - including terra cotta, brick, marble, stone, stained glass, wood and anodized aluminum - were replicated. This required careful design and manufacture of reproduced architectural pieces.

Many varied pieces of terra cotta, such as panels, scrolls, rose band pieces and cherubs, were replaced with new terra cotta fabricated to match the original in shape, size, texture and color. An exception to this was on the parapets, cornice and balustrade which were replicated using glass fiber reinforced concrete, but still maintained the desired size, texture and color. The replication of some ornamentation, such as cherubs with missing arms and musical instruments, required not only the skill of a mason, but the artistry of a sculptor. The superintendent at the site and other craft workers were able to carve new pieces using historic photos of the original building.

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