

COMMON BOND

CRAFTSMANSHIP, ARTISTRY & ARTISANS



15th Annual Sacred Sites Open House

INSIDE: Restoring Radiance: The St. Augustine Altar Heist and Revival | Conserving and Preserving Historic Sites | Restoring a Thriving Multigenerational Synagogue: How a Sacred Site Grant Supports an Historic New York Community | Hyde Park Mouldings: Work at the Central Synagogue Fire Restoration | Fire Prevention: Don't Get Burned

From the President

THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY

Dear Friends:

This year's Sacred Sites Open House theme was "Building for Eternity: Religious Architecture and Artisans."

It followed the tragic fire at Notre Dame and the wide interest in watching craftspeople use the original building techniques to restore the beloved cathedral. That successful restoration inspired a current campaign to restore the lost spire of the Cathedral Basilica of Saint-Denis, the first Gothic Cathedral, known as Notre Dames "big sister." The project involves training young people in traditional crafts, reviving centuries-old techniques.

Religious buildings were, indeed, built "for eternity." I am always drawn to the names on stained glass windows. Families believed that by donating a window, they were providing a lasting tribute to their loved ones. Every time we help a religious institution continue, I feel that we are redeeming that faith.

We hope that participants in our annual Open House Weekends, are moved by the beauty and history of the buildings they visit, and by the range of cultural and social service programs so many religious institutions provide to their communities.

Every project we help with our grants gives us an opportunity to admire the skilled architects, engineers and conservators who specialize in restoring religious buildings. We hope you will enjoy reading about some examples.

Obviously, we are in a time when many religious buildings of all denominations are closing. With each closure, we

lose history and community. That's why we have dedicated ourselves to helping maintain these important buildings for some 40 years. We have now given grants totaling more than \$14 million to almost 900 congregations of all denominations throughout New York State.

We are full of admiration for the congregations dedicated to maintaining these buildings and for the skilled artisans who restore them.

Sincerely,



Common Bond is the technical journal of the Sacred Sites Program of the NY Landmarks Conservancy.

The New York Landmarks Conservancy's Sacred Sites Program offers congregations throughout New York State financial and technical assistance to maintain, repair, and restore their buildings. In addition to providing hundreds of thousands of dollars in matching grants each year, the Conservancy offers technical help, workshops for building caretakers, and publications.

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Back issues are available in print and online at www.nylandmarks.org, Common Bond page. For additional information about the Sacred Sites Program or Common Bond, please contact Colleen Heemeyer at colleenheemeyer@nylandmarks.org

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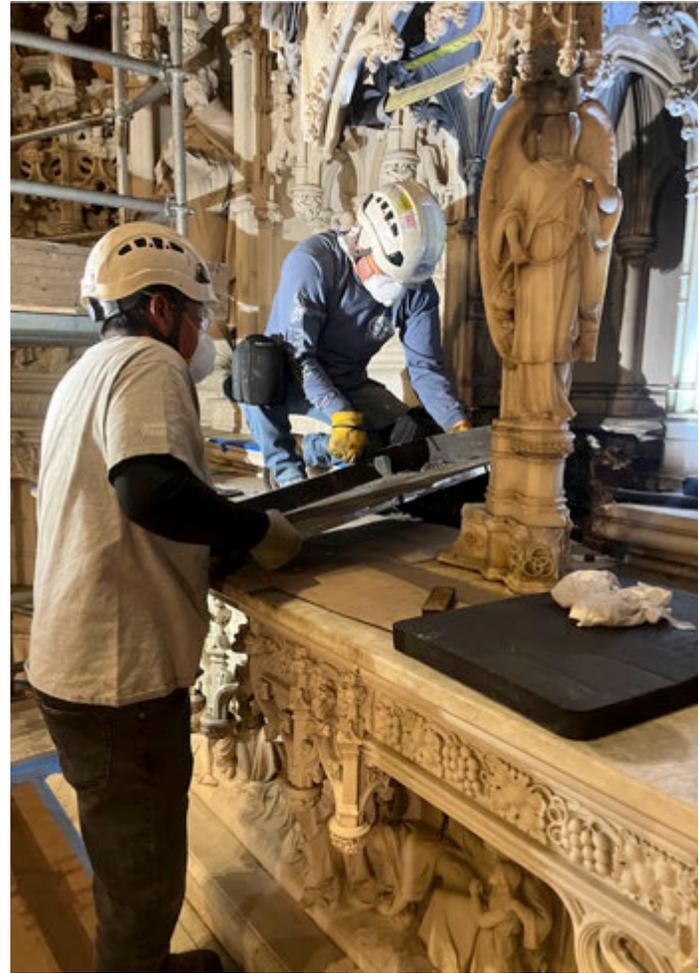
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Restoring Radiance:

The St. Augustine Heist and Revival

By Emily Valentine Sottile



BROOKLYN, NY

St. Augustine Roman Catholic Church is an extraordinary building. It has stood on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Sterling Place in Park Slope, Brooklyn for 133 years since construction was completed in 1892. Among the wonders of the church is the 1897 alabaster reredos by the Charles F. Hall Company, which housed a stunning gold and jewel encrusted tabernacle valued over \$2Million. In 2022 the tabernacle was stolen. In order to get at the gold within, the area around it was hacked apart, leaving an angel decapitated, and the force used to extract the tabernacle from the steel safe left the stone fractured and unstable.

EverGreene began by carefully removing the compromised safe, which had been integral to the altar's construction. This involved precision cutting and rigging to prevent further damage to the surrounding stonework. Small fragments of the stolen tabernacle including pieces of gold and precious stones were recovered during the safe's removal and returned to the church.





Conservators used an arsenal of tools to realign and repair the altar including epoxy, structural pins, and custom fills, resetting displaced marble elements and reinforcing fractured areas, including a broken column and detached finials. Cleaning the reredos used a combination of dry and wet methods to target years of soot, wax, and staining, reviving its luminous stone surfaces and intricate detailing.

The stolen tabernacle has not been recovered and the replacement is not nearly so grand as the original, but the blessed sacrament is once again housed within a stunning high altar, which is more resplendent than before the heist.

<https://evergreene.com/projects/st-augustine-altar/>



EVERGREENE ARCHITECTURAL ARTS *The EverGreene team has contributed to the restoration and preservation of many of our country's most significant and iconic masterpieces. From surveys and condition assessments, conceptual planning and design, to the implementation of large scale restoration efforts, we provide custom solutions for complex adaptive reuse and heritage preservation efforts.*

Conserving and Preserving Historic Sites

By Mari Gold

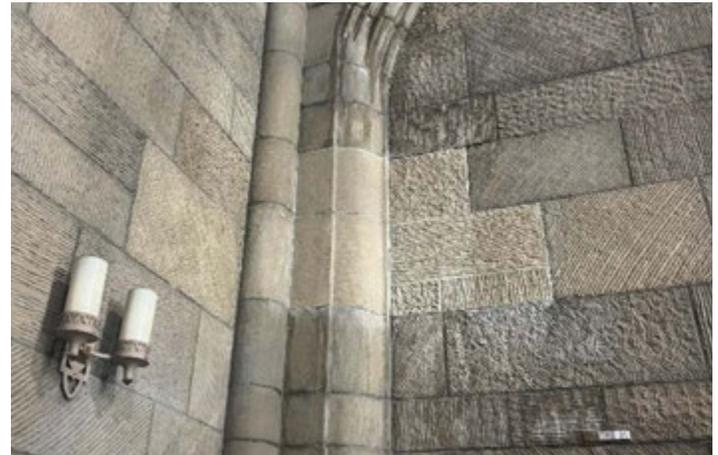
Mary Jablonski is President of Jablonski Conservation, Inc. (JBC), a full-service architectural conservation firm specializing in the preservation of historic buildings, monuments, and other cultural resources. The firm, founded in 1995, provides a full range of conservation services to a varied client base. JBC is privileged to have worked on a significant number of religious buildings ranging from highly decorated churches and synagogues to minimally adorned mid-century modern structures where any repair mistake is glaring.

“We use a combination of science, art, craft, and technology to preserve and prolong the life of historic and other culturally significant materials,” says Jablonski who has worked closely with New York Landmarks Conservancy staff on a variety of repair projects.

The projects below illustrate the importance of testing before undertaking restoration and repair work.

Kirkland Chapel at the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church

One ongoing project, under the care of Jennifer Kearney, a Senior Associate, is assisting the architect restoring the Kirkland Chapel at the Fifth



Avenue Presbyterian Church. This neo-gothic worship and musical performance space was designed by James Gamble Rogers and constructed in 1925. The interior features highly tooled buff cast stone, painted plaster, wood paneling, and a decorative wood ceiling with trusses, beams, and plaster bosses. JBC developed a multi-stage cleaning test program to remove soiling, staining, residue of floor wax, and calcium carbonate deposits from the cast stone walls. Cleaning that is not done carefully can lead to damage and therefore, testing is undertaken to find the gentlest and most effective cleaners. Well-designed cleaning tests also allow the owner to determine the level of clean that is acceptable. One of the challenges of cleaning interior spaces is that wet-cleaning methods are almost always excluded from consideration as large amounts of moisture are destructive to interior finishes, particularly decorative woodwork. No wet cleaning was used on the interior and some of the cleaning was done using lasers.

Riverside Church

Riverside Church has beautiful exterior wood doors with door hardware designed by Samuel Yellin. Work by Yellen, an amazing metalworker, is found at sites

ranging from churches to libraries, universities, and major estates around the country. At Riverside, the wrought iron hardware was corroding and the coating put on the hardware and doors was failing. Senior Conservator, Tania Alam, was tasked with understanding why the failure occurred and how to repair the doors.



Eight of the doors dated to 1930, while the rest were from 1959. The wrought iron metal of 1959 was different than the 1930s metal and had more

corrosion. The doors were found to be in fair to poor condition with major deterioration conditions including the corrosion of cast iron hardware, hazing, failure of the protective coating on wood and metal hardware, and wood deterioration on the lower parts of doors on the south and east elevations. Samples of the failing finish coat were analyzed and found to be a modern acrylic resin varnish. The primary cause of deterioration was determined to be the failure of the clear finish coat applied to both wood and iron hardware on all the doors.

It was discovered that the original patination had been removed when the doors were taken offsite and refinished. Repatinating metals is typically done with chemicals and heat; however, it is not feasible to repatinate hardware when installed on wood doors. As Samuel Yellen Metalworkers is still in existence, JBC consulted with Yellen's granddaughter, Clare Yellin, about possible treatments. She recommended painting the hardware to protect it.





St. Vincent Ferrer Church, Upper East Side, New York City

This 1918 church was constructed in the Gothic Revival style and designated as a New York City Landmark in 1966. The interior of the church is host to one of the last remaining, unaltered uses of Rumford Tile, developed by Wallace Clement Sabine, a pioneer in the architectural acoustics industry, and Rafael Guastavino, Jr. son of the Guastavino Company founder.

“The tile was heavily soiled from ninety-five years of use of charcoal-wax candles and incense. One of the challenges was to clean a very porous material without damaging it; therefore, a cleaning test had to be performed in an out of the way location,” Jablonski explained.



The cleaning tests revealed a much lighter interior as the Rumford Tile appeared to be a magnet for soiling, particularly from candle smoke and dirt that had accumulated with age. Testing allowed the Church to approve an acceptable level of clean and allowed the contractor to accurately bid the cleaning without guesswork as to products to use.

Rossville A.M.E. Zion Church Cemetery, Sandy Ground, Staten Island, NY.

Cemeteries are one of the most interesting cultural resources with vast amounts of historical data. Rossville A.M.E Zion Church Cemetery is considered one of the nation’s most significant African-American burial grounds. For this project, JBC was retained by the New York City Landmarks Conservancy to produce a Cultural Landscape Report. Stephanie Hoagland, a principal at JBC, produced the report.

At the start of the project, it was determined there were just under a hundred visible cemetery markers. Many early African American burial sites would have been delineated by shells, stones or other offerings.

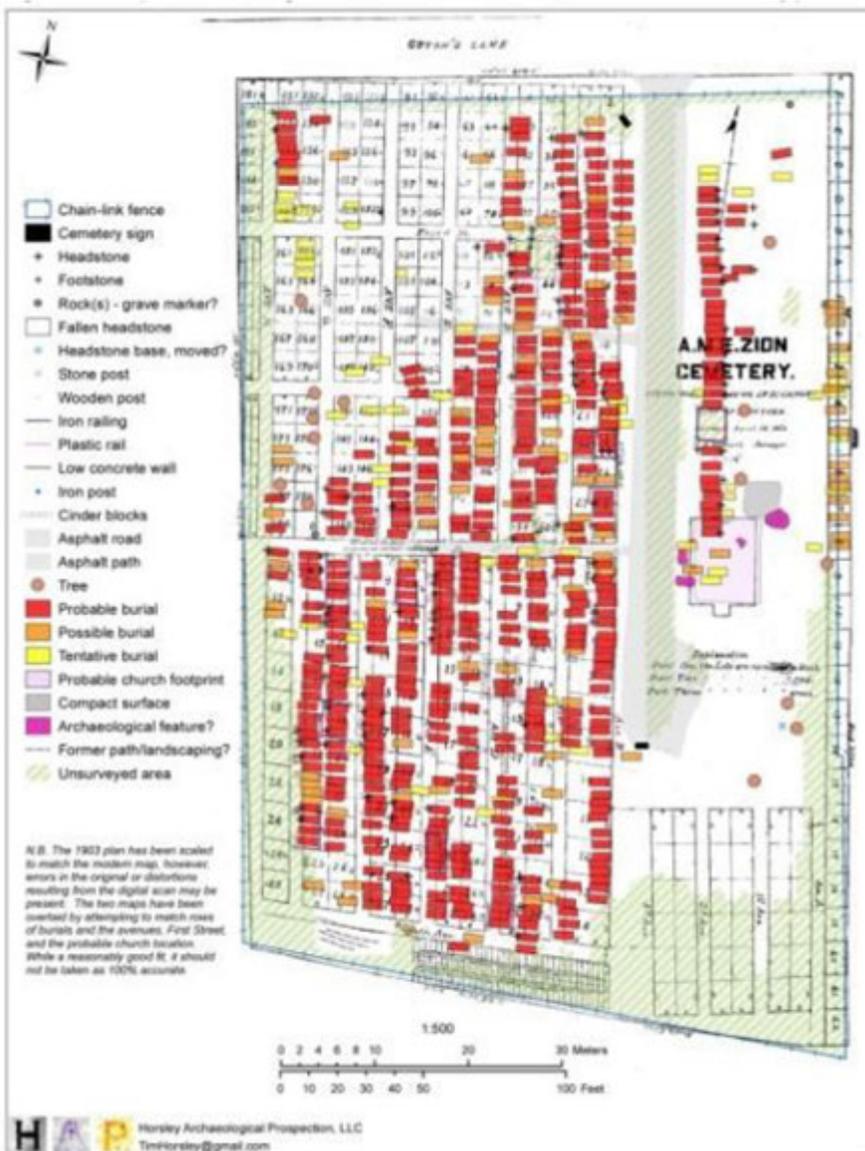
JBC teamed with Horsley Archaeological Prospection, LLC, to use ground-penetrating radar, (GPR), to search for unmarked graves. GPR identified four hundred eighty-one probable and



ninety-five possible burials.

“Our analysis and evaluation determined that the cemetery retained its integrity of location, design materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and that although it had been surrounded by modern construction, still conveyed its significance,” Jablonski noted.

“When dealing GPR in a situation like this, it is important to work with trained archeologists who are experienced in using GPR in cemeteries. If not, a good result is unlikely,” she added.



MARI S. GOLD is a New York City-based freelance writer who contributes to several magazines and websites. Among the topics she covers are food, travel, dance, theater and other arts. Her blog “But I Digress...” focuses on cultural events, travel and food at: www.marigoldonline.net

Restoring a Thriving Multigenerational Synagogue:

How a Sacred Sites Grant Supports an Historic New York Community

By Drew Hartley, AIA, Principal, ADP Architects



The far-left of three aluminum double doors, featuring cast aluminum and bronze decorative elements, has been restored and installed (April 2025).

The Hebrew Tabernacle Congregation of Washington Heights was originally established in 1906 in Harlem and moved to Washington Heights in the 1970s. The neighborhood, which harbored a melting pot of Irish, German, Italian and Eastern European Jewish immigrants from Lower East Side tenements searching for better living conditions uptown, had come to serve as a vital enclave for survivors of the German-Jewish Holocaust after World War II. Currently at 551 Fort Washington Avenue, the Hebrew Tabernacle occupies a three-story building designed by Cherry & Matz in 1931-32, formerly owned by the Fourth Church of Christ, Scientist.

The Art Deco building, clad in large gray bricks and trimmed with Indiana limestone, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Key features include a grand entrance of three aluminum double doors with cast aluminum and bronze grilles on West

185th Street facing Bennett Park, and a double-height sanctuary sitting above a basement.

Maintaining a building of this caliber is a challenge for many nonprofit institutions. As the Hebrew Tabernacle building has aged, it faces deterioration, deferred maintenance and accessibility challenges. Its badly oxidized aluminum doors no longer close properly, and the partially stepped entryways original to the building on a sloped street have outgrown a multigenerational congregation with an increasing need for accessibility.

When presented with the cost of replacing the Art Deco ornamented double doors, the Hebrew Tabernacle Congregation felt it was left with little choice but to consider the installation of plain metal doors with no ornamentation. This is where the **New York Landmarks Conservancy (NYLC)** stepped in to play a critical role in providing technical expertise



Manufacturing and installation of first set of artisan-crafted replacement doors completed by Shape Metalworks



Initial condition of doors.



Restored condition of doors.



and recommendations for professionals and contractors capable of performing the work, encouraging the congregation to keep the spirit and history of the original doors alive.

With the help of a **NYLC Sacred Sites Grant**, the Hebrew Tabernacle could follow through with a true restoration of its iconic double doors, making them accessible to the public. Acheson Doyle Partners Architects (ADP) completed an initial feasibility study and proceeded with salvaging the existing ornamentation, recasting aluminum and bronze decorative elements to match the historic condition of the doors, and reusing the original bronze lever handles on new code-compliant door hardware. ADP engaged Shape Metalworks to manufacture and install the Hebrew Tabernacle Congregation's first set of artisan-crafted replacement doors that meticulously honors their spectacular aluminum materiality and bronze ornamentation.

The congregation is hopeful that, through the momentum of its first Sacred Sites Grant, it can gener-

ate enough support to complete the restoration of the remaining two double doors and make the building fully accessible for the community to enjoy. The first set of doors to the Hebrew Tabernacle were installed at the end of April 2025.



DREW HARTLEY is a Principal with extensive architectural and project management experience in the hospitality, commercial, institutional, municipal and residential

sectors, working on all phases of design and construction. His project experience centers on the coordination of multi-pronged restoration and design efforts. Drew's expertise working specifically with historic buildings and landmark preservation issues has made him indispensable in the planning and design of various projects at the Metropolitan Club, University Club, 432 Park Avenue and a privately-owned penthouse at the Plaza Hotel. His historic preservation efforts on the completion of a mass-timber carriage house renovation earned an AIA Brooklyn Design Award in 2024.

Hyde Park Mouldings:

Work at the Central Synagogue Fire Restoration

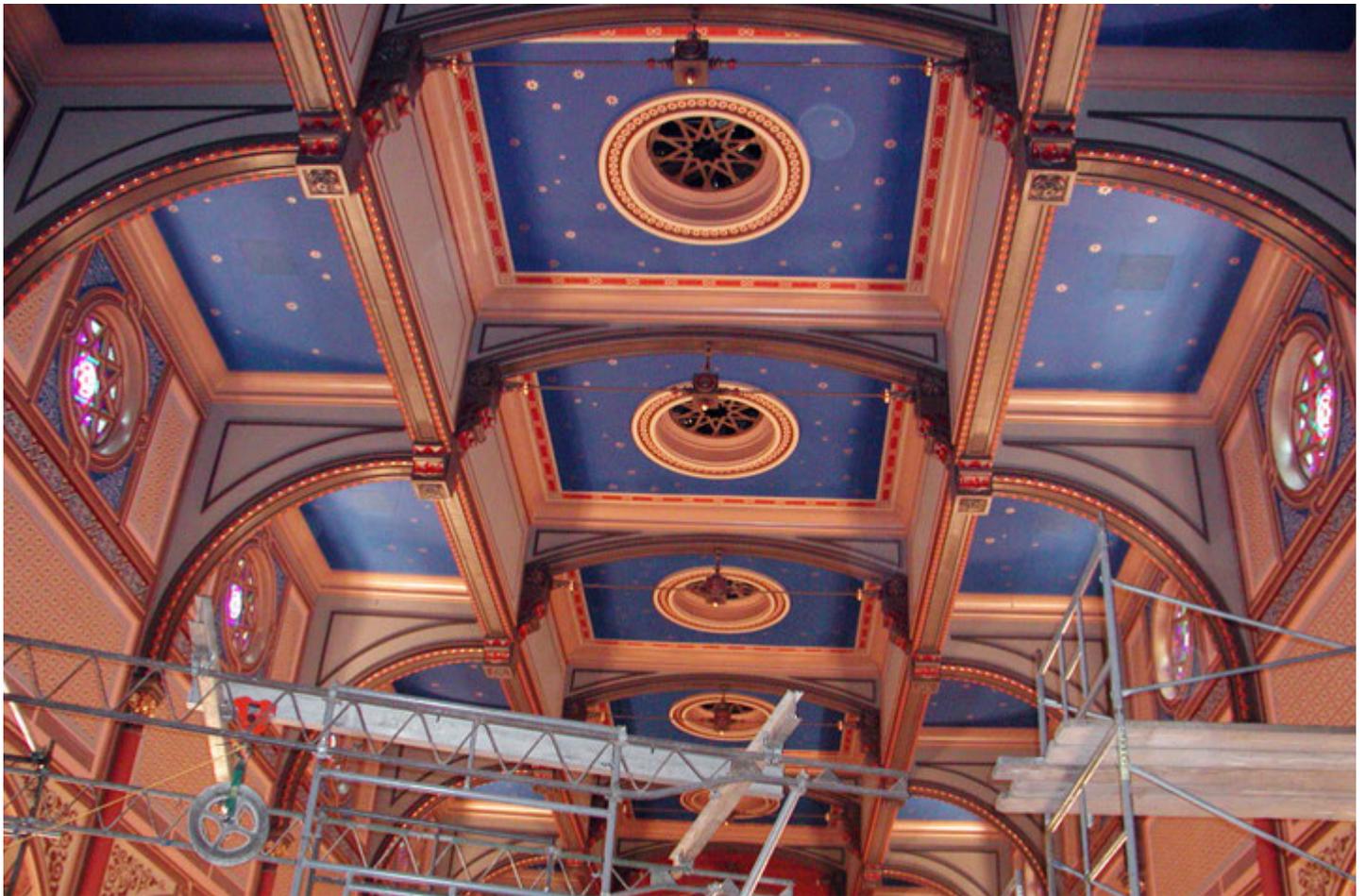
By Adrian Taylor



In August of 1998, a devastating fire engulfed the historic Central Synagogue in New York City, a jewel of Moorish Revival architecture originally completed in 1872. The flames tore through the sanctuary, ravaging its ornate plaster ornamentation – a rich tapestry of intricate motifs that had adorned the walls and ceilings for over a century. As firefighters battled the blaze, it became clear that the task of restoring

the synagogue to its former grandeur would require artisans of exceptional skill and dedication.

Enter Hyde Park Mouldings, a premier atelier specializing in the meticulous recreation of historic plasterwork. Engaged as part of Sciame Construction's team to revive the synagogue's opulent interior fibrous plaster elements, the firm undertook an ambitious effort to replicate every lost detail





with painstaking accuracy. Working from archival photographs, fragments of surviving ornament, and historical research, the craftsmen at Hyde Park Mouldings recreated the sanctuary's lavish medallions, arabesques, and filigree with precision and reverence. Each element was sculpted, cast, and installed to align seamlessly with the synagogue's architectural narrative, restoring the space to its original splendor while honoring its storied past.

The restoration of Central Synagogue became a testament not only to the resilience of the building itself but to the enduring artistry of those who brought it back to life. Hyde Park Mouldings' work stands as a masterclass in the delicate art of plaster restoration – a blend of scholarly research, technical expertise, and a profound respect for the past. Today, the synagogue's sanctuary once again radiates the grandeur of its 19th-century origins, a living monument to both the triumph over disaster and the power of craft to bridge eras.

HYDE PARK MOULDINGS

ADRIAN TAYLOR is a principal partner at Hyde Park Mouldings, a firm he first joined in 1996. He is a member of the New York Landmarks Conservancy's Advisory Board, and treasurer of the New York City Historic Properties Fund. In addition, he is a founding partner of Scenographia, a non-profit organization that organizes live drawing events to inspire appreciation for the timeless skill of hand-drawing and the human capacity to create.

Fire Prevention:

Don't Get Burned

By Drew Hartley, AIA, Principal, ADP Architects

“ There is no such thing as ‘one size fits all when it comes to dealing with fire and structures,” says Marrion. “Every building needs to be evaluated in terms of how it is used, the community it is part of and resources that are not simply financial but also take into account what owners, stewards and members of the community may be able to offer. ”

FIRE MANAGEMENT IS ALL ABOUT LEARNING FROM THE PAST.

These are the main areas of consideration.

An awareness of ignition sources

Take into account how the building is used. Do religious practices at the site involve burning butter lamps, incense or candles? Does the site hang banners? Does cooking take place anywhere in the structure? Are there piles of combustible materials somewhere like an attic or basement? Does the building have fire separators such as internal walls that might make a fire move more slowly?

Understand the current fire alarm system or lack thereof

“In a fire every minute counts,” says Marrion. “Many factors can contribute to a delayed response.”

Does the building have automatic smoke detectors? If it does, are they in a closet or another ‘hidden’ area? If there are no automatic detectors, does someone need to manually pull an alarm at a fixed location? Is there a sprinkler system and, if there is, has it been checked recently and is it in good working order?



When smoke detectors or sprinklers are installed, there are both aesthetic and financial considerations. So as not to conflict with the building's architecture and ornamentation, it is best, if possible, to not install them in highly conspicuous areas such as in the middle of a highly decorated ceiling or on walls adorned with paintings, carvings or other types of decorations. In these cases, a linear beam smoke detector system might be best.

Whatever detection system is used, it must be maintained. Be prepared to buy or rent very high ladders or cherry pickers along with professionals trained to use them.

Develop and maintain a relationship with emergency responders

Contact the local fire service responders and invite them to visit. To encourage this, it might be helpful to invite the family and offer tours of the building showing them spaces like winding stairs, attics and basements, offices and other areas.

Solicit their input on fire safety, so they will be prepared should a fire begin.

Inevitably it takes time for a fire department to get ready and arrive; when they do, knowing ahead about access routes and other building details will save precious minutes.

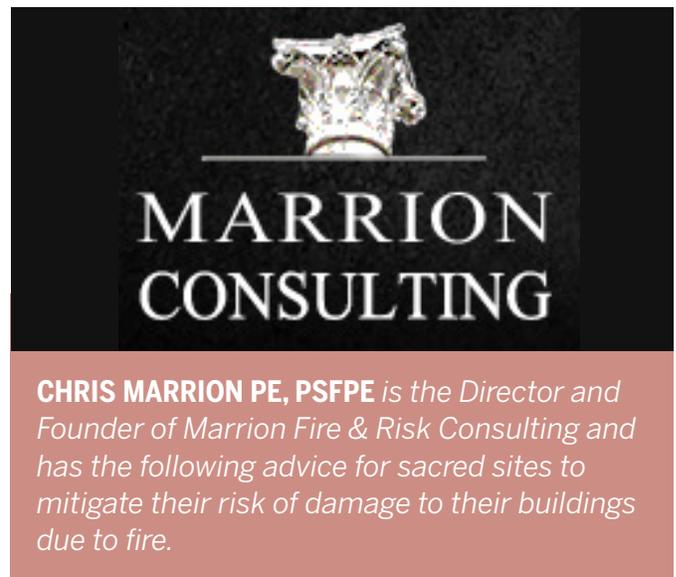
Discuss water pressure. The larger the fire, the greater the need for more water. If water pressure seems problematic, solicit input on what to do.

Take fire into consideration when the building undergoes any kind of restoration regardless how minor

Depending on what kind of work is undertaken, there may be cutting and welding. Workers may smoke (although this is not legal on any job site in NYC). Doors may be removed for repair. All these can make the building more vulnerable to fire.

Plan ahead before any kind of work and take steps to mitigate any opportunity for a fire to start and take hold.

Overall, the most important thing a sacred site can do regarding fire is to undertake a comprehensive fire risk assessment. Leaders should evaluate fire hazards throughout the site and what currently exists to mitigate these hazards including assessing ignition sources, combustible materials, fire alarm and sprinkler systems, fire separations, exits, evacuation plans, and training programs already developed. Ideally, sacred sites will benefit from consulting a fire engineering expert with specific expertise in protecting buildings like these by understanding and appreciating their unique needs.



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