

A portion of the existing courtyard was covered with a roof and enclosed behind a glass façade creating a new lobby. “Quiet” illumination from pedestrian pole-mounted luminaires contrasts with the bright welcoming ambience inside.



Photos: Zbig Jedrus

New York City’s Central Park is a sanctuary for joggers, Frisbee enthusiasts, softball players, concert goers and—this just in from the NYPD—very few criminals. The crime rate in the 840-acre park has plunged 89 percent for robberies and assault (and 72 percent overall) since 1990, according to CompStat. Maybe we can chalk it up to a strong police presence that covers everything from New York’s Finest patrolling the grounds to the new Central Park Police Precinct building, now freshly scrubbed, renovated and relighted.

The landmark structure was originally constructed in 1871 as a stable before being converted to a police precinct in 1936. The building, however, fell into such disrepair that by 2001 it was deemed unusable. “By the time we came to the job, the windows were broken and it was sort of an eyesore,” says Ken Douglas, principal, Illumination Arts, Bloomfield, NJ, which joined with Fred Basch Architect PLLC on the precinct restoration.

Today, the 1870s and 2010s have successfully merged on the northern edge of the park. After sitting empty for almost a decade, the building has been restored to its original High Victorian Gothic

Police Presence

An historic stable turned police station anchors Central Park

BY PAUL TARRICONE



Column-mounted fixtures accentuate the copper lobby ceiling and provide lighting for the officers below. Rather than being concealed, these CMH fixtures classic brick and stonework. The oldest part of the project is a sloped reservoir retaining wall (inset), now reused in the commander's office.

were selected to add a modern vibe to the space, in juxtaposition with the

cottage style, but also modernized to meet the present and future needs of the police department. It received a 2012 Lucy G. Moses Award from the New York Landmarks Conservancy as an example of historic preservation and adaptive reuse. "The architect saw a lot of great architectural qualities in the original building, picked up on a lot of details," and wove them into the new precinct building, says Douglas. "It's a joining of two periods, the 19th century and 21st century. The areas that are old make a statement that they're old, and the areas that are new make a statement that they're new."

The preservation began with cleaning and repointing the masonry, and installation of new stone. Next was restoration of the origi-

nal slate and copper roof, and conservation of the historic barn-loft doors, hayloft hooks and decorative tile. Cast iron columns, once hidden in the masonry, were revealed and the replica windows and doors now have finishes matching earlier decorative schemes.

TWO WORLDS

Even as the building functions as a police station, it's also a magnet for visitors to Central Park. Between 16 and 20 million people visit the park each year, many of them out-of-towners. "It gets a lot of tourist traffic," notes Douglas. "People will stop in and ask, 'How do I find the Museum of Modern Art?' The environment had to be nicer

than a typical police station; there had to be a welcoming sense."

The welcoming embrace of the building starts with the courtyard and adjacent lobby—the most conspicuous example of old meeting new. The goal was to bring part of the existing exterior courtyard physically inside the new building. To achieve this, a lightweight, glass and copper canopy was built over a portion of the open courtyard, creating the interior lobby. A glass façade fronts this new enclosed lobby. The result, says Douglas, "is an historic exterior with a modern touch—a mix of a glass storefront with old stone."

The building was kept to two stories to fit with other surrounding buildings, and Douglas used a light meter to gauge the outdoor

lighting nearby versus that in the courtyard. The lighting design in the courtyard area was meant to "feel bright but have a relatively quiet profile," he says. Visitors are guided through the courtyard by minimalist, contemporary-style pedestrian poles that direct them to the lobby entrance. Ceramic metal halide, 150-W luminaires (Architectural Area Lighting) provide indirect lighting to prevent sky glow. The light bounces off a disk at the top of the fixture, down onto the path. The six poles are positioned on either side of the courtyard to open the pathway to pedestrian traffic and create a glow along the edge of the building.

The blending of old and new is center stage inside the lobby, where on one side the walls are restored brick and stone, and on the opposite side new construction. Column-mounted, indirect luminaires highlight the curved ceiling line, allowing the architecture to "take the lead," Douglas says, while providing functional lighting for the officers who work in the lobby. Rather than trying to hide the luminaires in the vintage architecture, the design team went for "a contemporary look and personality." Winona 150-W ceramic metal halide units with scalloped front ends were chosen for the columns. Rows of metal halide downlights for general lighting finish the lobby design plan. The space needed to be bright without the benefit of direct sunlight, since the building is low and surrounded by trees.

Douglas calls the architecture and lighting design "an overlaying of two worlds on top of each other." But there's actually a third world that predates even the police station of the 1930s. The original building was constructed against a stone retaining wall for a reservoir. That sloped retaining wall remains today, acting as one of the interior walls inside the commander's office. New, old, oldest. ■

METRICS THAT MATTER

Central Park Police Precinct

Illuminance Levels: courtyard = 5.8 fc; lobby = 52 fc

Lamp Types: 7

Fixture Types: 30

THE DESIGNER



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