



FIRST LOOK

Rail Life

AT THE CORNER OF MAIN STREET and GE Patterson Avenue in downtown Memphis, a railway landmark has been rehabilitated, helping to rejuvenate the city's historic South Main Arts District.

Opened as a train station and office building in 1914, the eight-story building was constructed by the Illinois Central Railroad. This past winter, a development group that includes Kemmons Wilson Companies, the Henry Turley Company, and Valor Hospitality Partners unveiled its conversion into the Central Station Hotel. Part of a mixed-use, \$55 million adaptive reuse project, the building retains its original exterior. It also houses an Amtrak station that had to be able to operate without interruption during construction, which posed

a hurdle for contractor Robins & Morton. "It's kind of like changing the hubcap as the car is going down the interstate," says David Green of Robins & Morton.

BGKT Architects incorporated the main level's original concourse signs, which lend a cosmopolitan feel. The 123-room hotel, part of the Curio Collection by Hilton, also takes guests on an auditory journey through Memphis' musical history with its vinyl record collection, which contains more than 40,000 songs. Burnished metal details throughout the space recall Memphis's history of metal craftsmanship, and all the artwork inside the property was made by artists living and working along Amtrak's 900-mile City of New Orleans route. —Latria Graham

Dreyfuss + Blackford
Architecture oversaw the
rehabilitation of a classic
midcentury office building in
Sacramento, including its one-
of-a-kind tile mural by artist
Wayne Thiebaud.

PHOTOS BY BRUCE DAMONTE





SPOTLIGHT

Mural Support

Wayne Thiebaud is famous for his paintings of everyday objects like cakes, lipsticks, and lollipops. But just a few years before he became an internationally known artist, he created a large-scale tile mural for the under-construction Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) headquarters in Sacramento, California. Called *Water City* and completed in 1959, the 3,650-square-foot mural was conserved in the summer of 2019 as part of an \$83 million renovation of the International Style structure.

Albert Dreyfuss and Leonard Blackford, the building's original architects, requested a piece that would wrap around the exterior ground floor. Thiebaud came up with a four-panel abstraction of a city reflected in water: one section each for the east and west walls, and two sections for the south wall, which contains the building's main entrance. "In a sense, it's kind of an early history of the development of Sacramento," he says. He commissioned artisans in Italy to make glass tesserae (richly colored mosaic tiles) in variations of orange, red, blue, and white. The tiles were mounted on panels, which were sent to Sacramento and installed.

Almost 60 years later, the firm that still bears Dreyfuss and Blackford's names was selected to modernize the National Register-listed building. Dreyfuss' son, architect Alan Dreyfuss of Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates (WJE), managed the preservation aspects of the project. These included the conservation of the mural, which Dreyfuss calls "exceptionally important to the building."

Though 12-foot overhangs had protected the mural through the years, it had a handful of damaged white tiles and needed a thorough cleaning. WJE used a gentle detergent to restore the tesserae's natural luster and repaired tiles using identical ones salvaged from the building's all-white rear wall. "It was very delicate work, because we had to match the grout. Otherwise, it would be glaringly obvious that the tiles had been repaired," says WJE's Kyle Normandin.

The mural is Thiebaud's largest work, and now that its conservation is complete, his verdict is a thumbs-up. "They did a superb job, I think," he says. "It looks almost new." —Meghan Drueding



NEWS BRIEF

Color Theory

EVER SINCE JENNIFER WILKOSKI GLASS worked on the restoration of James Madison's Montpelier more than a decade ago, she had wondered why the main house's faded yellow front doors didn't match the vibrant yellows of its interior doors. That mystery has now been put to rest, following a six-week repair and refinishing project.

James Dinsmore, who helped oversee Madison's expansion of Montpelier, built and installed the front doors in 1809. They were initially painted a bold yellow ochre to indicate their significance; brightly colored paints were expensive at the time. As the property changed hands over the centuries, the doors were stripped or repainted on at least five occasions.

The mid-2000s restoration identified a lighter, plywood-like yellow color as original. But after more recent analysis, Glass and conservator Susan Buck discovered that the paint sample used for the restoration had degraded over time. They realized that the interior and exterior doors did match originally. Glass removed the three sets of doors one at a time, cleaned their hardware, and covered them in the closest commercially available match to their historical shade of yellow. The project was completed in February of 2020.

"We get lots of compliments on the doors now," says Glass, director of architecture and historic preservation at Montpelier, a National Trust Historic Site in Orange County, Virginia. "It's fascinating to look carefully at the craftsmanship of the doors and the other woodwork." —Nicholas Som

PERSONALITY

The Capital's Gain

Some of Washington, D.C.'s most recognizable sites—the United States Capitol Building and the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, for example—have been preserved with the help of architect Constance Lai, historic preservation manager at general contractor Grunley Construction. Lai also empowers the next generation of preservationists through regular speaking engagements, volunteer work, and service as a board member of numerous architecture and preservation organizations. We recently spoke with her about her career. —Lauren Walser

HOW DID YOU GET YOUR START IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION?

I have a professional degree in architecture and a master's in architectural studies. I moved to San Francisco in 2002 and started working for [architecture and preservation firm] Page & Turnbull. One of my first tasks was to go into the archives and research the history and photographs of buildings we were working on. Right away, I realized I could combine my interests as an architect with my love of history. Eventually I moved to D.C. I joined Grunley Construction in 2009 and have been there ever since.

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON?

Right now, I'm working on laser-cleaning the dome of the Jefferson Memorial and doing a complete exterior restoration of the

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Building.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR CAREER HIGHLIGHTS?

I led the construction-side survey team for the earthquake repairs for the Washington Monument, which meant setting the protocols for surveying, labeling, documenting, photographing, and cataloging all the stone conditions from top to bottom. I also spent five years [partly at a previous job] working on the modernization of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

In 2017, I received the Richard Morris Hunt Prize, a fellowship for an exchange program between French and American architects, and spent five weeks in France. It was wonderful to see the similarities and differences in our preservation practices. That exchange is something I'm passionate about, so I

FROM LEFT: JENNIFER WILKOSKI GLASS; SCOTT SUCHMAN



Constance Lai on the roof of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Building in Washington, D.C., a National Trust easement property. Another of her projects, the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, is in the background.

joined the board of the AIA Architects Foundation [the prize administrator] to help the continuation of the program.

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED YOUR WORK?

I was the guinea pig for giving a virtual talk for the D.C. Chapter of the Association of Preservation Technology. It's been our first foray into the virtual world. Normally, we get to see each other in person—with site tours, lectures, and happy hours—but with this pandemic, we said it's the perfect time to try something new and learn new tech platforms.

WHAT INNOVATIONS IN PRESERVATION MOST EXCITE YOU?

The ability to laser-scan existing buildings is incredible. It allows us to understand buildings in a three-dimensional way that we've never been able to do before. We can understand the exact dimensions in the spaces between the floors and find cavities in the walls that we didn't know existed, which helps us see how we can insert new infrastructure, like mechanical or electrical systems.

YOU DO A LOT TO PROMOTE DIVERSITY IN THE ARCHITECTURE AND PRESERVATION FIELDS. WHY IS THAT IMPORTANT TO YOU?

The responsibility of architects is to create spaces where our society can live, work, and play. It's important that the people who are designing these spaces reflect the population that they're designing for. America is very diverse. We need to have those same faces in our profession, because it makes what we do in providing these spaces to the public much more relevant. That's our goal: to make spaces that are relevant to the communities that are using them.



INSPIRATION

Telling the Full Story

For more than a decade the National Trust has been strengthening its capacity to save places related to African American and other underrepresented histories. This work paved the way for creating the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund (AACHAF), the largest preservation campaign ever on behalf of African American history, activism, and achievement.

Since January of 2018, the fund has enabled the National Trust to model innovative preservation approaches, take direct action to protect African American cultural heritage, and conduct critical research exploring how preservation impacts equity, displacement, and affordability. Additionally, AACHAF awards cash grants to projects that preserve Black history sites and stories. To date, the National Trust has received almost 2,000 proposals requesting nearly \$190 million in grant funding, and by the end of this year, it will have invested more than \$4.3 million in nearly 60 AACHAF preservation projects.

“Later this summer we will announce our 2020 grant recipients, which will include the City of Minneapolis,” says Brent Leggs, AACHAF executive director. “The funding will enable a partnership between the city and the African American community to document significant historic places as a way of healing

community divides and offering hope to many.” Clayborn Temple (above)—a church central to the Memphis, Tennessee, Civil Rights protests and the 1968 sanitation workers’ strike—will also receive critical funding.

Past Action Fund grants have supported hiring new staff positions at cultural heritage organizations like the Emmett Till Interpretive Center in Mississippi and Weeksville Heritage Center in New York. Grants have also funded much-needed research in places like the historically segregated Westside neighborhood of Las Vegas and Freedom Colonies across Texas. Preservation planning for an HBCU icon called Fountain Hall at Morris Brown College, where W.E.B. Du Bois wrote his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk*, was also made possible through this funding.

“Now is the time to elevate the important history imbued in these places and stories,” says Leggs. “With humility and in partnership, we work with communities to expand the American story on behalf of all Americans.” The 2020 list of grantees is expected to include a diverse range of places and overlooked stories that exemplify the richness and complexity of American history. To learn more about these places and to celebrate this year’s grantees, please visit SavingPlaces.org/african-american-cultural-heritage. —Dennis Hockman

OBJECT LESSON

Think Piece

It's never easy to follow in the footsteps of a famous parent, but Margaret French Cresson managed to pull it off. Cresson—the daughter of Lincoln Memorial sculptor Daniel Chester French—realized she had a genuine talent for sculpting after trying it out on a dare from a family friend. She studied with artists in New York City and Boston, as well as with her father at Chesterwood, his western Massachusetts estate that is now a National Trust Historic Site.

In 1920, when Cresson was in her early 30s, she created one of her most acclaimed works: *Girl with the Curls*. The luminous marble portrait head of a young girl—a likeness of Helen Geary, thought to be a family acquaintance in Stockbridge, Massachusetts—was modeled in clay, then plaster, and carved by the Piccirilli brothers, master carvers in the Bronx, New York. “It’s not just a straightforward portrait of an individual,” says Donna Hassler, executive director of Chesterwood. “There’s something that’s really intriguing and conveyed in a thought-provoking way. The subject seems almost at a distance. She’s thinking about something else.” The piece is on display in French’s studio at Chesterwood.

Cresson gained a reputation as a respected sculptor of busts and reliefs and was elected to the National Academy of Design in 1942. She wasn’t the only female sculptor to be encouraged and mentored by French; his onetime assistant Evelyn Beatrice Longman also became a well-known artist. Works by Longman, as well as additional pieces by Cresson, are part of the National Trust’s collection at Chesterwood. Visit chesterwood.org for information on the site’s summer opening status and an online exhibition of Cresson’s work. —Meghan Drueding



NEWS BRIEF

School Memories

OVER A PERIOD OF 90 YEARS, Native American students arrived at the Stewart Indian School in Carson City, Nevada, in circumstances as varied as the different tribal cultures they represented. Many were made to attend the boarding school against their and their family’s will, as part of the federal government’s forced assimilation policy. “Some were just picked up in a cattle truck [and taken to the school], and their parents didn’t know where they were,” says Bobbi Rahder, director of the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum, which opened in January. “In other cases, the parents wanted the kids to go, or the kids may have wanted to. Alumni have told us there were many different reasons.”

The school operated from 1890 to 1980, and the 110-acre site is now on the National Register. The Nevada Indian Commission worked closely with the state historic preservation office and Reno, Nevada-based H+K Architects on the rehabilitation of two structures—the 1923 Administration Building and the 1925 post office—that now house the museum. Both were built with locally quarried stone by Hopi and Italian masons, as well as student apprentices. The stone walls and fireplaces were preserved as part of the rehab, as were original wood ceiling beams and windows.

The museum addresses the school’s complicated legacy with exhibitions based on input from Stewart alumni and relatives. A self-guided audio tour of the grounds and a virtual tour are both available; visit the museum’s website, stewartindianschool.com, for updates on its opening status. —Meghan Drueding