



## FIRST LOOK

## Creative Solution

**THE TENEMENT MUSEUM'S ORIGINAL** building, at 97 Orchard St. on Manhattan's Lower East Side, had been restored one floor at a time since founders discovered it in 1988. Even as the "ruins" there—layers of wallpaper and recovered objects—revealed how people lived in tenements, the building still needed structural work nearly three decades later. "It wasn't designed for millions of people to visit," says Annie Polland, the museum's president.

Funding and permits to stabilize the floors and stairs, repair the facade, and incorporate an HVAC system came together midway through 2022. The problem was timing: The museum would have to close the building just a year after visitors returned following its pandemic shutdown.

"It was too heartbreaking to shut down just after we'd reopened," says Chelsea Bracci, director of digital

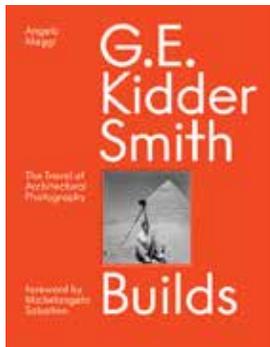
projects. She and her colleagues wondered, "How could we continue to tell these stories in a physical way?"

The solution: Transform classroom areas at the museum's other historic tenement building at 103 Orchard St. into re-creations of three of the four 97 Orchard apartments. (The fourth one was re-staged offsite.) The curatorial team hired a set designer from a local high school, along with fabricators and scenic painters, to assist them in reproducing the apartments, which housed Italian and Jewish families from the 1860s through the 1930s. (The re-created Baldizzi kitchen is shown above.)

When 97 Orchard is done later this year its furnishings will return, and the exhibits will resume as before. "We absolutely want no change in how it looks," Polland says. The goal was simply to "strengthen our bones and our hearts." —Lisa Selin Davis

NEWS BRIEF

# Photo Finish



AFTER OBTAINING A DEGREE in architecture in 1938, G.E. Kidder Smith realized his calling. He wasn't as interested in designing buildings as he was in documenting them, and he spent much of the 20th century doing just that. "It was architecture and the built environment that absorbed his interest, inspired his invention, and triggered his creativity," writes Angelo Maggi in his new book, *G.E. Kidder Smith Builds: The Travel of Architectural Photography* (ORO Editions, 2022).

With the help of his wife, Dot, Kidder Smith photographed buildings in Brazil, Sweden, Italy, and Switzerland (among other places) and compiled his pictures and text into lovingly produced books meant to appeal to the general public. Later in his career, he and Dot focused on architecture in the United States, taking pictures of places as varied as the Mesa Verde cliff dwellings, New England churches, and the Las Vegas Strip. Unlike many architectural photographers of the time, Kidder Smith often included people in his images. He also highlighted the merits of both historic and contemporary design. In the foreword to Maggi's book, Michelangelo Sabatino pinpoints Kidder Smith's legacy: "With determination and skill, he expanded the culture of architectural appreciation." —Meghan Drueding



PERSONALITY

# Reclaiming the Past

Freedom House, a museum located in an early 19th-century building in Alexandria, Virginia, reopened on Juneteenth of 2022. Purchased by the city of Alexandria in March of 2020, the newly revamped building contains expanded exhibition space highlighting its role in the domestic slave trade, as well as Virginia's 400 years of African American history. We spoke with Audrey P. Davis, director of the Alexandria Black History Museum and a senior team leader for Freedom House (both part of the city's Office of Historic Alexandria), about the site. —Tim O'Donnell

**WHAT IS THE HISTORY BEHIND FREEDOM HOUSE?**

Freedom House is the site of several firms that trafficked human beings between 1828 and 1861. The most notorious was probably Franklin and Armfield. We know that thousands of men, women, and children were trafficked through this building. While the building is very tragic, it's incredibly important. We feel this block of Duke Street is sort of ground zero for the story of the domestic slave trade in the United States. So I think this building has so much history to share not only at the local level, but at the national level as well.

**HOW DID THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA END UP TAKING OVER THE MUSEUM?**

When the Northern Virginia Urban League purchased the building in the 1990s, we were so excited because it seemed like poetic justice to have an organization that works to empower people of color, especially the African American community, take control of this once-notorious

site where African Americans were treated cruelly and abused and enslaved. They created a wonderful exhibit.

In February of 2018, the Office of Historic Alexandria entered into a partnership with the Northern Virginia Urban League. At that time, the exhibit was in the basement. The rest [of the building] was classroom and office space. We came on during Black History Month to help manage the museum.

Then the Urban League decided they wanted to sell the building. There were a lot of maintenance issues [and] preservation issues. We felt that it was too important to let go into private hands. So we requested the city consider purchasing the building.

**WHAT WORK WAS DONE BEFORE THE REOPENING?**

We had new floors put in, new paint, new lighting. But the most important thing came from the National Trust, when we received one of the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund grants for \$50,000 in 2018. That was used to help fund our



historic structures report by SmithGroup. It has also set us up for the continuing preservation work that we are going to be doing in the next few years.

**WHAT DO THOSE PLANS INVOLVE?**

We're looking at the brickwork, looking at the windows, looking at the building architecturally. What year do we want to take this building back to?

What you're seeing here currently in our exhibits on our three floors is temporary... [We present] a history about the domestic slave trade... and our local history. [On the



Freedom House Museum received a \$50,000 grant from the National Trust's African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund in 2018. For more information on the Action Fund, visit [SavingPlaces.org/african-american-cultural-heritage](https://SavingPlaces.org/african-american-cultural-heritage)

third floor are] the paintings of the late Sherry Sanabria, [who captured] what is vanishing from our landscape, these places that housed African Americans during slavery ... We'll have input from scholars so that when we take these exhibits down in a few years and reopen with new exhibits, you'll have a very comprehensive story.

We're also looking at what we can learn from slave manifests. As more people are discovering their family history, we're hoping we can get those manifests and have data here for people who are interested or think that there may be a connection for their family to this building. We also hope that we can use this site for discussions about race, equity, and reconciliation.

**WHAT HAS THE VISITOR RESPONSE BEEN SO FAR?**

There's a gamut of emotions. You do get people who are



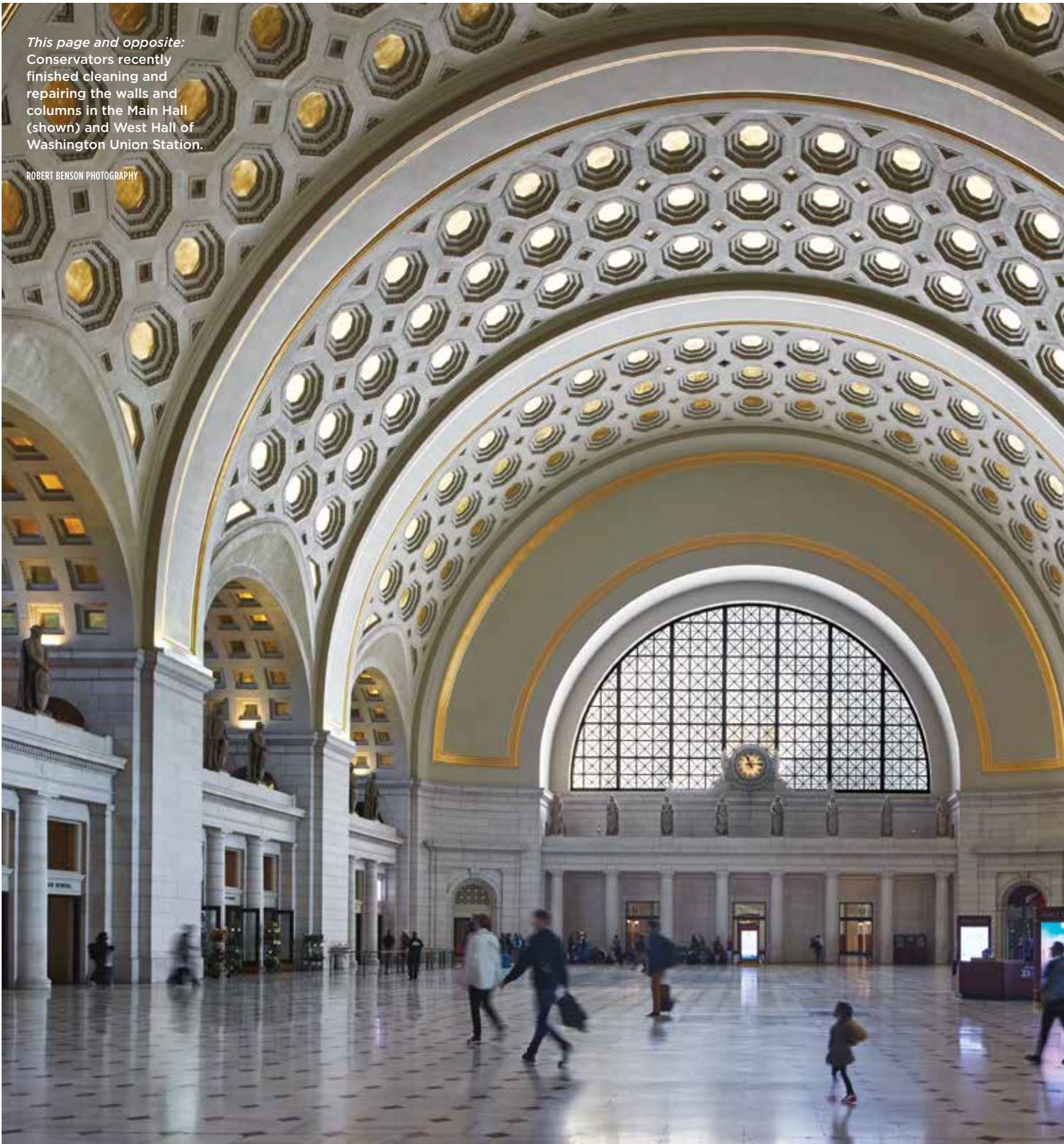
overwhelmed by it all. We keep tissue boxes everywhere because people often cry and often are upset because of the history. Then you have people who are dying to bring family and friends here because they didn't know this was here. [This history] is something we need to be sharing and talking more about.

*From top: Audrey P. Davis inside Freedom House Museum, which reopened to the public on Juneteenth of 2022; The Alexandria, Virginia, museum's exterior.*

FROM TOP: SCOTT SUCHMAN; VISIT ALEXANDRIA

*This page and opposite:*  
Conservators recently finished cleaning and repairing the walls and columns in the Main Hall (shown) and West Hall of Washington Union Station.

ROBERT BENSON PHOTOGRAPHY





## SPOTLIGHT

# Clean Sweep

**W**ashington Union Station has served as a major transit hub in the nation's capital since it opened in 1907. With thousands of people traversing its Daniel Burnham–designed halls almost every day for more than a century, it's only natural that surfaces got a little dirty. That's why, in 2021, the Union Station Redevelopment Corporation (USRC) began to clean some of the original masonry and finishes in the Main Hall and West Hall for the first time in decades. With funding aid from the city's Transportation Alternatives Program, USRC hired conservators from Cheshire, Connecticut–based John Canning & Co., which had restored dozens of historic statues in the Main Hall in 2019.

Between December of 2021 and October of 2022, project manager David Gough and lead conservator Rachel Gilberti oversaw the cleaning of the halls' Bethel White granite walls and columns. After experimenting with different methodologies, Gilberti settled on soaking the surfaces with a water-based solution to restore them to their original color. Additional tasks included



Over the past decade, the National Trust has provided the Union Station Redevelopment Corporation with five different grants for preservation work.

giving a shine to metal doors and bronze plaques, repainting several surfaces, and replacing a chunk of missing granite at the base of a column. The entirety of the \$1.2 million project took place amid the hustle and bustle of an active train station.

USRC project manager Sarah Mayersohn considers Canning's results "quiet"—that is, people who aren't familiar with the station may not notice a change, but anyone who knows the halls well will be struck by the difference after the cleaning. The conservators also kept an eye on the future. The team left a few inconspicuous spots uncleaned so the next generation of preservationists could "understand what we started with," says Gough. —Tim O'Donnell

BY THE NUMBERS

# Brightening a Beacon

**R**ick Cain, director of museum services at the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum, constantly notices the 1874 lighthouse's sturdy details. "The craftsmen of the 19th century were highly skilled," he says. "They built things to last." But the weather on Florida's northeastern coast takes its toll, and the iconic black-and-white, spiral-striped structure recently underwent its most extensive restoration in 30 years. The work was completed in August of 2022. —Meghan Drueding



**219** Number of newly restored steps, mostly cast iron; all but 4 are original.

**\$630,000** Approximate cost of the restoration work, funded primarily by the state. Other donations came from the Florida Lighthouse Association, the St. Augustine community, and private individuals.

**1.2 million** Quantity of bricks in the original 1870s shipment from an Alabama brick company. Crews repainted the exterior masonry walls with fade-resistant coatings as part of the restoration.

**9.5 feet** Height of the original Fresnel lens, made in France and installed inside the red lantern in 1874. The lens is still in use and did not require restoration, but the lantern was repaired and repainted.

**363** Number of days per year the site is open to the public, generally from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. (It is closed on Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day.) Specialty after-hours tours are available by request.

**30 seconds** Duration of the fixed flash pattern that serves as the lighthouse's unique nightmark, so navigators can easily identify it in the dark. The lighthouse is still in service 24 hours a day.



## OBJECT LESSON

### Light Work

THE TIFFANY STUDIOS FLOOR LAMP that currently stands in a corner of the Gentleman's Lounge at Filoli in Woodside, California, is not the one that helped illuminate William Bourn's poker games in the early 20th century. The contents of the house, built in 1917 by William and Agnes Bourn as a private residence, had largely been auctioned off before the estate became a National Trust Historic Site nearly 60 years later. When Filoli's curatorial team started restoring the lounge in 2020, they had only two historic photographs of the room to go on, plus a swatch of the original wallpaper and an inventory drawn up after the Bourns' deaths in 1936. The inventory helped identify artwork from the couple's original collection. But although it mentioned a Tiffany floor lamp in the lounge, it didn't name the specific design—and the lamp didn't appear in the photo.

So the curatorial team drew on their knowledge of the Bourns' choices elsewhere in the house to figure out the best match. "They seemed to go for understated beauty," says Julie DeVere, Filoli's former director of museum collections. Donor Brad Parberry ultimately selected a Tiffany floor lamp from the early 20th century that features Tiffany's "Pine Needle" pattern. Placed next to a pair of brown leather vintage-style club chairs, the lamp rests on three lily-pad feet, its bronze stem rising to a green opalescent slag-glass shade. "The room has so much green in it, from the vining on the wallpaper to the tops of the poker table and pool table," DeVere says. "It looks like it should be there." —Ron Nyren

FROM TOP: ST. AUGUSTINE LIGHTHOUSE & MARITIME MUSEUM; LUCAS SAUGEN