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New York Landmarks Conservancy Presents Lucy G. Moses Preservation Award to the American Museum of Natural History

WJE Engineers, Architects, and Materials Scientists Restore Museum to Its Original Brilliance

NEW YORK, NEW YORK (April 27, 2010) — The New York Landmarks Conservancy presented a 2010 Lucy G. Moses Preservation Award to the American Museum of Natural History, honoring its dramatic restoration. Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. (WJE), the project architect and engineer of record, provided comprehensive restoration services to the museum's historic Seventy-seventh Street facades and monumental wood windows.

The annual awards celebrate projects, individuals, and organizations who contribute to the preservation of New York City. They are the conservancy's highest honor. This year marked the twentieth anniversary of the awards, which were presented April 21, 2010, at the American Museum of Natural History.

The Seventy-seventh Street facades were built in the late nineteenth century by the architectural firm of Cady, Berg & See. In recent decades, deterioration of the building's historic facades prompted the museum to embark on a comprehensive restoration plan that also included relevant mechanical systems, site landscaping, and facade illumination.

"We believe that the American Museum of Natural History project demonstrates excellence in the restoration of this well loved historic structure on many planes, including the analysis and selection of appropriate materials and details, the high quality of the contractor's craftsmanship, the collaborative nature of the project team, and, most importantly, the tangible results," said WJE Project Manager and Senior Principal Timothy Allanbrook.

WJE found that most of the stone facades were fundamentally sound and free of significant structural distress. However, cracking, exfoliation, delamination, efflorescence, and various forms of soiling were also observed. As a result, the project team performed a detailed cleaning study that included field testing and refinement of cleaning recommendations.

Masonry repair techniques included traditional dutchman patches, mortar-based patch and crack repairs, and pinning for stabilization and anchorage. WJE specified rosendale-cement-based mortars for all masonry repointing. The project team carefully chose stone to match the museum's variegated pink and red granite facade.

The porte cochere and stairway, a prominent central feature of the facades, suffered from displaced massive granite parapets, shifted stair treads, and corroded steel support beams. Extensive water infiltration contributed to stained and spalled arch brickwork, eroded mortar joints, and organic growth at the curved ashlar walls. Removal of the parapet sections, treads, and selected wall masonry allowed for underlying steel beams and masonry support wall repairs.

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Nearly all of the monumental wood windows constructed of North American black cherry were repaired and restored to their original configurations. More prevalent repairs included the replacement of deteriorated sash and wood sills.

A majority of the existing materials at the central plaza was restored. Curative work included replacement of the asphalt block paving, bluestone curbing, and metal fences—all designed to conform to the Department of Parks and Recreation standards. Primary changes included the raising of the circular planter with the addition of a seatwall modeled from the building facade and constructed with complementarily colored granite.

About WJE

Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. (WJE), is an interdisciplinary firm of architects, structural engineers, and materials scientists that specializes in the investigation, analysis, testing, and design of repairs for historic and contemporary structures. WJE focuses on delivering practical, innovative, and technically sound solutions across all areas of construction technology. Since the firm's founding more than fifty years ago, WJE specialists bring the collective experience gained from conducting more than seventy-five thousand investigations worldwide to every construction challenge. WJE combines state-of-the-art laboratory and testing facilities, nationwide offices, and knowledge sharing systems to provide solutions for the built world. For more information, please visit wje.com.

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