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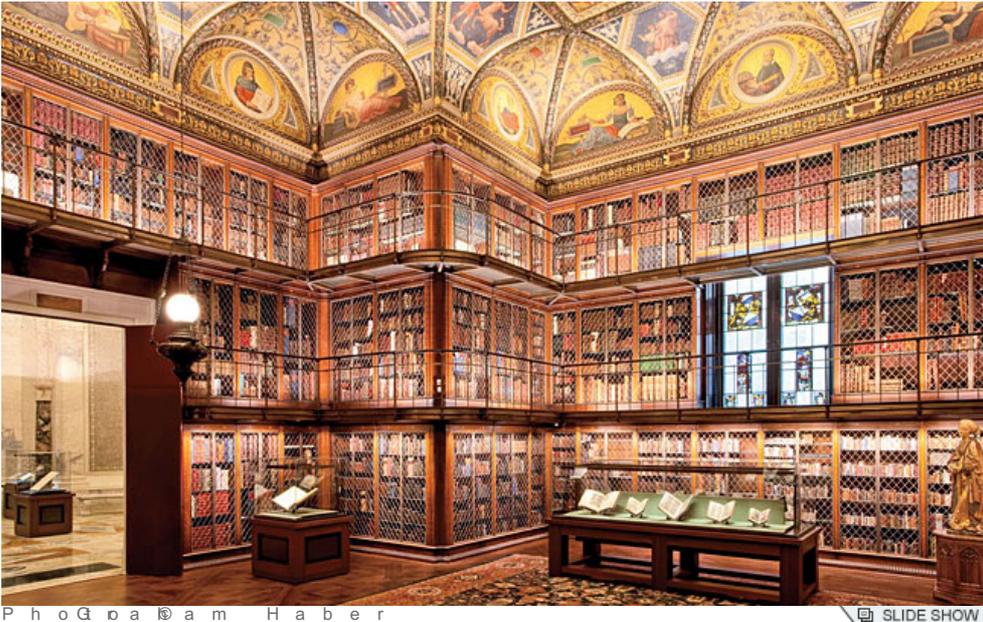


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## The Morgan Library & Museum

Beyer Blinder Belle

New York City

**A stunning restoration casts new light on the interiors of the historic Charles McKim building.**

By James Murdock

Admirers of the 1906 Morgan Library & Museum who felt that Renzo Piano's 2006 expansion overshadowed the historic rooms of J. Pierpont Morgan's former study and library — housed in an Italianate marble building designed by McKim, Mead & White principal Charles McKim — can banish pangs of resentment. A dazzling interior restoration, realized by Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners in collaboration with the lighting firm Renfro Design Group, has renewed and enhanced its previous luster.



SLIDE SHOW

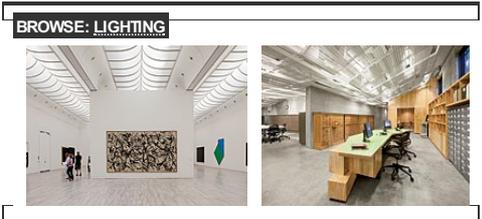
According to museum director William Griswold, the recently completed overhaul was inevitable, but museum leadership excluded it from the brief of Piano's expansion [RECORD, October 2006, page 93]. Fortunately, Griswold was able to proceed in mid-2010 when an opportunity was created by generous trustees and favorable construction pricing.

The \$4.5 million project marks the first significant cleaning of the 14,700-square-foot landmark's interior since the early 1990s. Beyond creating additional exhibition areas, the work included updating the wiring and outdated lighting, as well as restoring early fixtures. The building now displays more than 300 items from the Morgan's permanent collection of rare books and art (a

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the vaulted roof, Beyer Blinder Belle's Cleary Larkin, AIA, and the Morgan's director of facilities, Thomas Shannon, covered the vault's underside with a white synthetic rubber membrane (EPDM). Renfro then added T8 fluorescent strips to bounce indirect light off this highly reflective material down into the room.

With similar intent, Renfro transformed a covered oculus into a light source for the adjacent domed rotunda, the former grand foyer. To do this, he and Larkin suspended panels of low-iron, stippled rolled-glass (which transmit unaltered light rays) above the existing glass lens. A new shed roof conceals supports for the panels, as well as AR111 halogens that focus beams of light on the displays. Halogen lamps illuminate the contents within the cases, including a copy of the Declaration of Independence.

"The McKim building is, in many ways, the heart and soul of the Morgan," observes the Morgan's Griswold. "This project allowed us to burnish that part of the campus. Now the balance between new and old is where it should be."

James Murdock is a writer and filmmaker based in New York City.

tenfold increase) in rooms with vastly improved lighting.

"Our goal was to hide the lighting and reveal the great architecture," notes lighting designer Richard Renfro, AIA. The building's landmark status, which prohibits visible and irreversible changes, proved less of a challenge than it might have seemed. Technological innovations allowed Renfro to insert smaller, more efficient fixtures into existing spaces. He removed decades-old track lights from a 16th-century wood ceiling in Mr. Morgan's former study, called the West Room, and replaced them with discreet tracks and low-voltage MR16 halogen lamps powered by remote transformers.

In the East Room, Morgan's library, The team relamped and rehung an original chandelier, removed in the 1940s. Renfro replaced glaring fluorescent tubes, installed in pockets above and below each of three levels of original bookcases, with customized LEDs. These cast a glare-free, even light with no spillover onto adjacent areas. To eliminate irritating bright spots, Renfro lit the bottom bookcases from above and the two upper levels from below. This shields the eyes of visitors gazing at the richly painted ceiling and leather volumes displayed behind nonreflective acrylic glazing.

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