



## **Helpern completes restoration of St. Agnes Library in Manhattan**

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The summer's good news for the library-lovers of Manhattan's Upper West Side is that the St. Agnes branch of the New York Public Library has reopened after four years of renovation and decades of declining conditions. Helpern Architects transformed the building, at Amsterdam Ave. and West 81st St., under a double contract with the NYC Department of Design & Construction [building] and the New York Public Library [interiors].

Now re-established as a neighborhood resource, the building is what Dr. Paul LeClerc, NYPL president/CEO, has called "the single best renovation of a Carnegie library I have ever seen."

Part of the work of New York City-based Helpern Architects - since the start of its practice nearly 40 years ago - has been to renovate and preserve institutional buildings. "Stewardship matters," said David Paul Helpern, FAIA. "Whether we preserve what exists and make it viable for new times, or we design new places, stewardship is an important part of our responsibility as architects."

According to Helpern principal-in-charge Margaret Castillo, AIA, the restoration of St. Agnes's limestone Renaissance Revival facade, with its three large, distinguished arched windows, entailed replacement of the aluminum frames and metal front door with historically accurate replicas. Helpern Architects also added an ADA-compliant ramp, replicated the original wrought iron fence, and installed a new roof.

Visitors will benefit from compatible new lighting, bookcases, an elevator, and a librarians' desk. Helpern Architects also completely restored the wood paneling, wood floors, and the building's focal point: a monumental, three-story-high central staircase. "We also kept the original iron hooks around the railings, in case any 21st-century children try to slide down." Castillo said.

"We are particularly proud of this project, which restored an historic community treasure while making it technologically state-of-the-art to benefit library patrons of all ages," said David Burney, department of design and construction commissioner.

Aside from reading spaces for both children and adults, the new layout includes a community room and space in the basement for the library's ongoing book sale.

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