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2005 FAITH & FORM RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE AWARD



The New Church (Swedenborgian), a delightful Greek Revival temple structure located on East 35th Street, was forced to close its sanctuary in 1990 due to the imminent collapse of the ceiling. Constructed in 1859 by ship carpenters and congregation members, very shallow wooden roof trusses were dam-

aged by water from leaks in the roof, and the chords had separated from each other. Working closely with structural engineers and with the church's clergy and congregants, the architect provided a detailed analysis of the existing problems and a plan to enhance the structure aesthetically and functionally,

painstakingly preserving original details.

Scaffolding was installed and jacks slowly raised sagging trusses a half-inch at a time. Sistering joists with steel plates and epoxy glue reinforced cracks in the wood, while some trusses were entirely rebuilt. Original plaster egg-and-dart details are carefully preserved from within the ceiling. Where they could not be saved, fiberglass moldings were made to recreate the originals. A tarred-over and damaged skylight in the chancel was repaired and reopened, illuminating the main altar and restoring Emmanuel Swedenborg's vision of a new church, in which "lay the open Word enveloped in a sphere of light, the splendor of which surrounded and illuminated the whole pulpit."

The cornice and dentil moldings on the exterior of the structure were repaired and replaced where necessary, along with a severely cracked and damaged glass entrance canopy. This room accommodating 350 persons is now open to the city, as the church makes it available for concerts, lectures, support groups, and other events.

RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE RESTORATION

New Church (Swedenborgian)
New York, New York

AWARD Honor

ARCHITECT
Alexander Gorlin Architects

CONTRACTOR Kel-Mar Designs

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER
McLaren Engineering (William Gorlin)
Joseph K. Blum Company

PHOTOGRAPHY
Peter Aaron/Esto
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JURY COMMENTS

This restoration places great emphasis on lighting and accentuating the altar, giving it a heavenly glow. Artificial cove lighting, all of it indirect, contributes to the ethereal quality of the space. The light appears to be so beautiful, so serene, so quiet—almost Zen-like. There is a very subtle use of color. Very sophisticated restoration technology was used to restore the ceiling.