

Architectural Artifacts Saved and Alive Again



Free Library of Philadelphia



Philadelphia Art Museum



Grey Tower Castle (Arcadia U.)

Saving the work of a great Architect

What do these three buildings have in common?

They're all in Philadelphia and they were all designed by Architect Horace Trumbauer.

These buildings and many others of his design are icons in our lives. And yet, even the work of a great artist like Horace Trumbauer is not immune to Demolition.



The Grand Kuhn house, tragically torn down in 2001

Some of it was saved and restored and now takes its place again because of the care and stewardship of a few good men.

Dr. James Bonner, who lived in the endangered Grand Kuhn house as a child, was determined to save the Centre Hall. He commissioned architectural specialist John Dorety to carefully and meticulously deconstruct the entire room. The Room measures 18 x 21 and is completely paneled from floor to ceiling with millwork complexly arranged in many layers of trim and molding.

John took on the laborious task of carefully separating each layer and panel from the walls, taking note of the design patterns and the craftsmanship details. What John didn't know as he deconstructed each piece was that the room was going to be wholly resurrected in a new location. Fortunately, he has been deconstructing and reconstructing architectural artifacts of all descriptions since 1984. The piece was moved, cataloged, stripped, refinished and carefully sequestered, using sophisticated museum handling standards.

Dr Bonner decided to build a “New to Look Old” 1780 farmhouse and began the complex thought processes which would result in the best way to incorporate the Grand Kuhn Center Hall into the floor plan of its next destiny. The focus became finding the best way to work to integrate the historic room into the art and flow of the new house. It was decided to create an addition specifically designed to house Trumbauer’s work entirely. The Central Hall became the Library in the new house.

In order to create both logistically and aesthetically the optimal shell design to showcase this famous work, John began to lay out all of the original pieces in sequence. The addition had to be planned just right. John took great pains to monitor every detail, with careful attention to the symmetry for the columns, panels and mantle. The placement of the windows, doors and chimney and the shell itself were designed specifically and with the minutest accuracy to receive Horace Trumbauer’s work.

The Trumbauer room was carefully transported to the site and once again, laid out and put in place, custom –fitted, piece by piece. There are over 1500 pieces of trim and paneling. Some of the trim pieces in the Egg and Dart trim pattern are 1” x 1 ¼”. There was no room for error and there was every need for enormous skill and devastating patience. The installation took about 8 weeks.



Before



After

The entire sequence from discovery to final completion took about a year and 9 months

This is the same process that was replicated over and over by Mr. DuPont and his team in the rooms at Winterthur. Multiple rooms of the mansion were remodeled and tailored to enfold the meticulous reconstruction of antique rooms from around the world.



John Dorety on site, at the “layout” board

Teamwork and collaboration get a multi-phased, complex project like this done. John Dorety was an able leader in the restoration and reconstruction process. John has vast amounts of experience disassembling, handling and repairing architectural antiques. He does so with the curiosity and awe which help him to understand both the piece and the artist who created it. Who better to bring Trumbauer’s artistry to life again?

Thank you, Dr Bonner for your stewardship. Thanks to you, Horace Trumbauer’s work not only survives but is back in service!

Written by

Jona Harvey of Architectural Salvage Network

Preservation Artistry by

John Dorety of John Dorety Antiques



Demolished in 1980

Trumbauer Building, Whitmarsh Hall-in Wynnewood, Pa