

January 20, 2011

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

NATIONAL TREASURE

Historic Park Ave. Armory gets a makeover

By LOIS WEISS

THE unique historical Park Avenue Armory has just been stabilized in the first phase of a \$200 million restoration project being overseen by Tishman Construction that will earn a Silver Leadership in Energy Efficiency & Design designation.

The Armory was built by the Seventh Regiment of the National Guard in the 1880s and, while owned by the city, is also a National Historic Landmark. Its unique red brick fort-like façade covers the entire block between Park and Lexington Avenues and E. 66th and 67th Streets.

Tishman, now part of AECOM Technology Corp., faced many challenges giving the ancient structure modern day comforts including better heat, air conditioning and upgraded bathrooms.

For instance, when brick that matched portions of the façade was finally found, the installation required hand-shaving a slice off hundreds of bricks in order to make them fit.

"It's difficult to match old brick," said John Overend, vice president of Tishman, who is the project manager on the job.

The armory itself will continue to be transformed through 2013 with a major restoration and revitalization project by Herzog & de Meuron with Platt Byard Dovell White as executive architect.

According to Rebecca Robertson, president and CEO of the Armory, about \$68 million has been spent on the first phases of the renovation with \$110 raised of the needed \$200 million. "Tishman has come in on or under budget on everything," she said.

Robertson had previously worked with Tishman on the restoration of the New Amsterdam Theatre as part of the Times Square redevelopment. "They really loved that building, and this building, and you have to take a huge amount of care with these restorations," she explained.

Overend noted, "She is passionate about the arts and this has been a real collaboration with the Armory personnel."

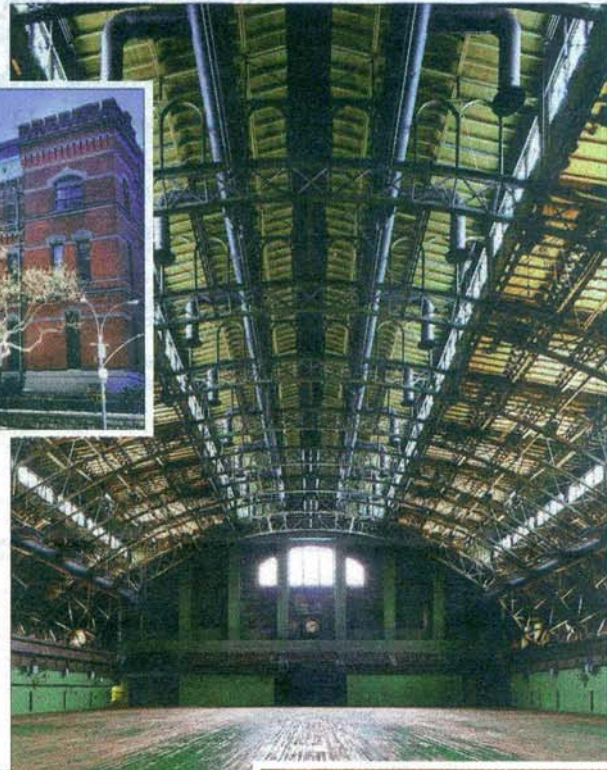
As the Armory was originally privately developed by the members of the Regiments, there are 16 so-called Company rooms that were designed for each Regiment by the premier architects of the time. "None is smaller than



Helayne Seidman



Courtesy Park Avenue Armory



gibox

800 square feet," said Robertson. "The scale is extraordinary."

These include rooms by Louis Comfort Tiffany and Stanford White, all filled with elaborate woodwork and antiques. "They are by super-important designers and architects who were doing the mansions of the members of the Seventh Regiment," Robertson said. "The members of the Regiment were the leading businessmen and wealthiest denizens of New York City."

"Trading Places" is among the movies that were filmed in the Company rooms with other areas used for "Sex & the City" and "Boardwalk Empire." Work on the Company rooms will be conducted during later phases.

Central to the current Tishman project is the 55,000 square foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall that is an entirely column-free space some 90 feet high. Tishman crews had to create a temporary work platform about two stories high, suspended just below the arched ceiling, in order to reinforce the truss structure and install performance infrastructure.

"That enabled the men to work section by section, on what we called the 'dance floor,'" said Overend. This also allowed the Armory to continue hosting its various programs. "The entire

The Armory was originally built for the Seventh Regiment of the National Guard. It's drill hall (above) can house art displays (left) while the building has also been a movie set ("Boardwalk Empire," right).



ceiling was accessed through this platform. There were some tight corners and some acrobatics to get to things."

While working on the platform, the millwork, sashes, glass and even the walls around the 161 windows that surround the top of the main drill hall were replaced, along with the adjacent copper gutters. Motorized black-box black-out curtains were installed over them so the facility can be transformed into a theater at the touch of a button. They also fixed the leaky roof and hung theatrical lighting and rigging.

Back on terra firma, a quiet, hot water radiation system was installed. To add air conditioning that had previously been pumped in from trucks stationed on Lexington Avenue, Tishman and its subcontractor integrated the 130-year old masonry into new steel frames within the Armory towers to support the new cooling units. To make room for the chill-

ers and Con Ed steam service, workers also had to remove and then replace load bearing walls. Seismic monitors had to be used throughout to ensure the many Tiffany stained-glass windows, clocks and cut crystal regimental trophies and vases in the Company Rooms were not disturbed.

Subcontractor Lina Gottesman, President of Altus Metal, Marble & Wood, oversaw the conservation of the bronze front gates and bronze hardware on the front doors. Normally a green patina forms to protect the bronze but chemicals from the city air and calcium in rainwater caused oxidation and a crust formed that had to be gingerly removed along with paint on the gates.

Work is paying off as the Armory continues to host the Art & Antiques show each year and is now able to showcase artists and theatre groups. "We hope to start work on the exterior Park Avenue side in 2011," added Overend.