



Restoration experts uncovered a painted-over mural in the lobby of the Sherry Netherland, a 1927-built co-op and hotel on Fifth Avenue.

Ber Murphy

REAL ESTATE

NYC real estate loves old tricks for new homes

By [Emily Nonko](#)

April 19, 2017 | 7:21pm | Updated

During New York's prewar housing boom at the turn of the 19th century, decking out your townhouse with carved woodwork, stained glass and marble mantels was the norm — not the exception. Today, well-kept historic detailing means a premium in the market. For the first quarter of 2017, brokerage Halstead tracked a 5 percent increase in pricing for townhomes throughout brownstone Brooklyn, with the price for one now averaging \$2.38 million.

Although New York doesn't have as many architectural craftspeople as it did in the early 1900s, artisans, who are experts in preservation, still practice their trades all around us. They're responsible for keeping all of New York's historic real estate looking new — and can even make some of the new structures look old.

The growing popularity of restoration stemmed from the formation of the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) in 1965. The commission began designating neighborhoods historic districts at the same time New Yorkers started gentrifying neighborhoods with gorgeous older townhouses, like Park Slope and Harlem.



Restoration work on places like the Sherry Netherland's lobby is carried out at EverGreene Architectural Arts' Brooklyn studio.

Stephen Yang

As the value of such homes rose, demand for architectural craftspeople increased. Their meticulous services allow homeowners to adhere to the LPC's stringent requirements for renovations. They also satisfy the growing number of old house lovers who want to spruce up their pieces of city history.

"It is a big part of New York's economy now," says Jackie Peu-Duvallon, a historic preservation consultant [who runs her own firm](#). "It's proliferated in the last 20 or so years."

Business is good, for example, at [EverGreene Architectural Arts](#) founded in 1978. The Brooklyn-based studio has worked on high-profile restoration projects, from the ornate Rose Main Reading Room of the New York Public Library to various historic lobbies around the city.

"We've seen an increase in good stewardship, and a greater awareness from real estate [owners], about really caring for what's special in their buildings," says Kim Lovejoy, vice president at EverGreene.



Deborah Mills can recreate intricate woodwork in her Long Island City studio.

Brian Zak/NY Post

At the Sherry Netherland, an Upper East Side co-op/hotel combo where available apartments range from \$675,000 for a studio to \$13.5 million for a full-floor pad, EverGreene was tasked to restore the lobby. Underneath a white ceiling, the firm discovered an Italian Renaissance-style mural painted in the 1920s. Their team spent six months removing layers, restoring the artwork underneath to its original splendor.

Although EverGreene is a larger firm, most New York craftspeople operate independently. Vincent Battiloro, of [The Finest Brownstone Wood Restoration](#), learned his trade as a teen in Italy. He moved to New York in 1960 — a time when preservation was less popular — and picked up odd jobs like repairing wood furniture in hotels.

"The business changed when young professionals realized that instead of paying \$1 million for a studio in the city, they could buy a brownstone in Park Slope," Battiloro says. Today he mainly restores high-end woodwork in townhouses — much of which gets painted over or varnished — from decorative fretwork to carved doors to elaborately detailed staircases.

"I'm getting busier every year," he says. "I'm 75, but they won't let me retire."

Larry Feldman, of [Feldman Stained Glass](#), got into his field as a teen growing up in Greenwich Village, helping repair windows at local antique shops. These days, from his Jersey City studio, he restores elegant stained and leaded glass "for

landmark buildings and the like.” His work appears in the historic lobby of Tudor-style 370 Central Park West (where a two-bedroom co-op is on the market for \$995,000) and private residences from the Upper West Side to upstate New York.

Feldman says it can be difficult to talk pricing with homeowners on tight renovation budgets. “The stuff coming out of Home Depot is different than what I do,” he says. Hiring his careful restoration work can cost thousands of dollars. But as he points out, “stained and leaded glass is a forever thing — to fully restore the stained glass will make it last another 100 years or more.”

Deborah Mills, a custom wood carver based in Long Island City, admits her skills are pricey but valuable. “Wood carving is often one of the last things to come into a project, when homeowners might already be over budget,” she says.

But **her firm** is up to any task, including recreating mantels, cornices and friezes for homeowners.

“It’s surprising how often people see a beautiful work and think it could never be replicated today,” she says. “Well, we could do it.”

Some artisans are applying their age-old crafts to brand-new buildings. Nick Smacchia, of his company **Plastering by Nicholas**, has done his share of historic restoration — he’s the guy they call to fix the plaster moldings at Gracie Mansion.

But Smacchia also designed high-gloss plaster staircases for 111 W. 57th St., a residential skyscraper now under construction atop the historic Steinway building.

The developer of the tower, JDS Development, is known for incorporating high-end, historically inspired finishes into its projects.

At 111 W. 57th, along with co-developer Property Markets Group (PMG), the firm is restoring the landmarked lobby of the Steinway building, which residents will enter to get to multimillion-dollar apartments. As for Smacchia’s staircases, they’ll decorate the penthouse apartments.



Peep the staircases at 111 W. 57th St.
Hayes Davidson



Jersey City-based Larry Feldman handcrafts stained glass for area private homes and lobbies.
Zandy Mangold

Although sales have yet to launch officially, the skinny tower’s 60 units are expected to start at \$16 million and could reportedly reach \$60 million for a penthouse.

At Stella Tower, an Art Deco showpiece at 425 W. 50th St. converted to a 51-unit condo in 2014, JDS and PMG hired a team of eight craftsmen to restore the stately “crown” at the top of the building. The Hell’s Kitchen development currently has seven units available

between \$1.85 million and \$11.99 million.

“We want to make a building shine to its best possible capacity, not only to provide a premier living experience for residents, but also for New Yorkers to enjoy as they walk past,” says Marci Clark, JDS’ architectural historian.



Chetrit Group is converting the former Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank at 49 Chambers St. (right) into 99 luxury condos. Amenities include a rooftop deck (left) that incorporates the building’s original carved limestone balustrades. Units currently on the market range from \$1.95 million to \$5.2 million. Move-ins are expected in about a year.

Williams New York

New development 49 Chambers St., in Lower Manhattan across from City Hall, will house 99 luxury condos in a Beaux-Arts building originally designed for the Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank. Chetrit Group restored the grand bank lobby, which soon hold a retail tenant. Stained glass skylights decorate the ceiling and tellers’ windows are framed in ornamental brasswork.

“We’re breathing new life into the building,” says project architect Jeremy Singer, of Woods Bagot. “We want to carry the building’s rich tradition into the future, while making the interior of the apartments modern.” The top of the building will house a glass-walled rooftop park, framed by original carved limestone balustrades.

Six apartments are listed between \$1.95 million and \$5.2 million at the building, which is expected to wrap construction within the next year.

Without a doubt, modern technology has helped today’s craftspeople. To restore the Steinway lobby, JDS scanned the ceiling with lasers to help replicate its original frescoes.

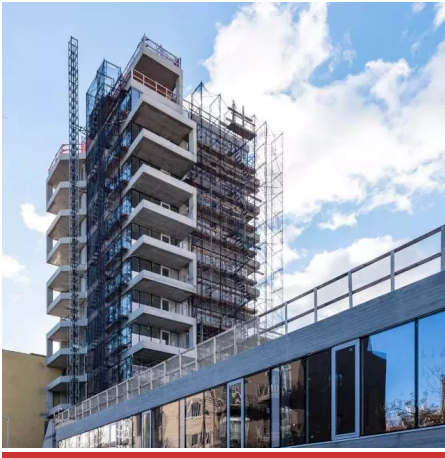
Across the river in Williamsburg, ODA Architecture utilized modern-day tools to replicate an old-school concrete design.

The firm’s 32-unit condo project 190 S. First St. — which will welcome residents this year and is priced between \$575,000 for a studio and \$4.45 million for a three-bedroom — features board-form concrete.

Workers are using a technique that originated when wood was used to cast concrete for buildings more than a century ago. The practice was phased out when reinforced steel became the go-to for shaping smooth concrete chunks for construction sites.

ODA harkened back to the tradition of wood casting to get a uniquely warm, slightly veiny texture for 190 S. First St.’s facade.

But the firm updated the method for creating the cast. Unlike if it were made of wood, “this cast can be used up to 100 times,” says Christian Bailey, partner at ODA.



The final product, however, looks like it could have been formed a century ago. “The imprint of the wood, which remains in the concrete, leaves a tapestry of time in the texture of the concrete,” Bailey says.

In New York, it turns out, timeless design never gets old.

190 S. 1st St. sports unique building DNA.
Field Condition

FILED UNDER **ARCHITECTURE**, **HISTORY**, **NEW YORK CITY**, **TOWNHOUSES**

Recommended by

|