

William Starr Miller House: An Architectural Analysis

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The William Starr Miller House is a refined and sophisticated beaux-arts residence turned into the Museum Neue Gallery (Figure 1). It is found on the prominent 5th Ave in New York City, known as Museum row, as the street houses many renowned museums. Built in 1914 by the architecture firm Carrere and Hastings for Industrialist and venture capitalist William Starr Miller. Miller had stakes in Chase National Bank and The United New Jersey Railroad and Canal Company. The house was built in the Louis XIII style. After his death, it was sold to a Vanderbilt, the YIVO Jewish Center, and finally to its current owner Ronald Lauder and Serge Sabrosky, who transformed the house into an Austrian art museum called the Neue Gallery New York (Kathrens, p. 220).



Figure 1

The prominent art collectors hired Annabel Selldorf to carefully restore the house to its former glory but add modern touches. The renovation was done with a delicate touch that respected and elevated its true ornate style yet subtly modernized it to the standards of the 20th century. As Selldorf states, "you continually make judgments about how to keep the entire work coherent and intact yet also serve the purposes of exhibiting art" (Stephens). She left the beaux-art interiors intact to elevate the art shown on the wall by the stark contrast between the oak panels and Marble (Brake). As stated, "the Neue Galerie, however, aspires to dignity rather than consumerism" (Brake).

Found tucked smoothly between two high-rise apartments; one finds the residence. The narrow side of the house can be located on 5th Ave parallel to the famous Central Park, while the entrance and wide side face north and open to 86th street. The entry is guarded by a highly ornate wrought iron and glass door. The door is surrounded by a limestone flat arch and

stonework that nods to the idea of embedded piers with capital volutes upholding a stone balcony (Figure 2).



Figure 2

Looking at the façade of the house, we see a distinct three-part composition with a prominent projected center. The ground floor is comprised of rusticated stonework and windows capped with flat arches with an extended central keystone (Figure 3). The second and third stories are grouped with windows surrounded by quoined limestone and ionic pilasters. The second floor has long windows with a balustrade with narrow ovals and segmental arches on top of flat arches. The second floor has shorter windows found under an articulate frieze with dentals and geometrical patterns (Figure 4). The mansard roof is surrounded by a balustrade of urns under dormer windows capped by segmental and triangular pediments and circle bulls-eye windows (Figure 5).



Figure 3

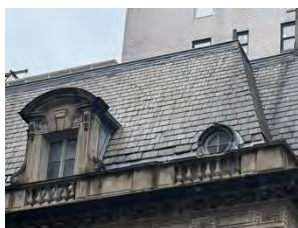


Figure 5

The ground floor is made entirely of white limestone and wrought iron. In contrast, the upper section is a mixture of windows surrounded by the same limestone and expanses of red brick between the windows. Again, the roofline is made up of limestone balustrade and windows projecting before a grey shingled roof. The building is held up primarily by stone and brick load-bearing walls.



Figure 4

The floor plan of the house turned museum reflects its past life and its transformation into a public space. The front entrance leads into a smaller vestibule that opens to a grand

entrance hall. The dining room turned restaurant is to the right of the entrance hall, and to the left is the reception room turned gift shop (Figure 6). The grand staircase in the entrance hall leads to the second floor, where the museum's main gallery is held. There are three main rooms that lead from one to the other and back to a hall that overlooks the staircase (Figure 7). An interior elevation shows a prominent dome that lies atop the grand entrance. The space above the dome is left open to allow natural light to shine through the dome (Figure 8).



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

One enters the vaulted vestibule that holds another set of wrought iron and glass doors that are reached by small but sweeping steps. (Figure 9) The vestibule houses half-round shell moldings (Figure 10). This leads to the grand double-decker entrance hall with its elegant marble sweeping staircase with a wrought iron banister (Figure 11). The floor is clad in French black and

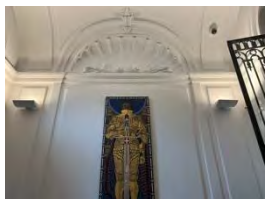


Figure 10

white checkerboard marble, while a gigantic glass dome caps the ceiling, held up by four composite columns (Figure 12). Many of the hall's rooms are paneled with wood and contain marble fireplaces.

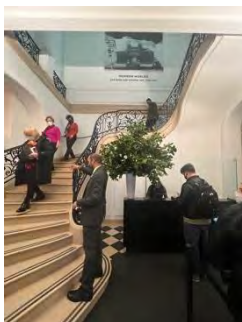


Figure 11

The building relates to the chateau de Baviille, built in France and completed in 1677 (Figure 13). The chateau refers to the William Starr Miller House with its long and narrow composition and central projecting part. It is also built with red brick and windows surrounded by limestone quoins. It has a similar expressed steep dark roof with projecting dormer windows.

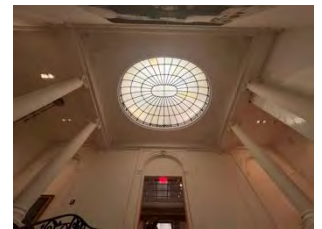


Figure 12



Figure 13

The William Starr Miller House is a pristine and orderly representation of the great houses American industrialists built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They were inspired by the aristocratic homes found in London, who looked to copy the atmosphere of affluence that the aristocrats' homes exuded. (Kathrens, p. 9). The era ended, and the industrialist homes mostly eventually made it into the hands of organizations that allowed the public to enjoy them and understand how the industrialists added to American architecture's character.

Bibliography

Brake, Alan G. "Radical, refined: New York's Neue Galerie respects the sensibility of its early 20th-century Austrian and German art collection without lapsing into nostalgia." *Architecture*, vol. 91, no. 6, June 2002, pp. 84+.

Article provides understanding of how interior space relates to the art of the gallery.

Kathrens, Michael C. (2005). *Great Houses of New York, 1880-1930*. New York: Acanthus Press, pp. 9, 220.

This book provides basic historical details and architectural descriptions.

Stephens, Suzanne. "Annabelle Selldorf Brings the Sensibility of Mies and Loos to the Conversion of a Beaux Arts Town House into the Neue Galerie in New York City." *Architectural Record*, vol. 190, no. 5, May 2002.

Article describes the restoration and the architect's vision.