

# REPORTER

ISSUES, PEOPLE, PLACES, TRENDS

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## Poetry and Power

*The rebirth of a Beaux-Arts landmark in Cleveland* || BY ARNOLD BERKE

**CLEVELAND**—WHEN THE U.S. POST Office, Custom House, and Court House opened here in 1910, it was meant to show off this city's growing economic and cultural prowess—as well as the power of the federal government. That steel, car manufacturing, and other industries had made Cleveland the nation's sixth-largest city was reflected in architect Arnold W. Brunner's gray granite structure in the high Beaux-Arts style, its four facades lavished with columns and pilasters, balustrades and brackets, and other classical essentials. Brunner capped each corner with a pair of stern American eagles, anchored the main facade with two Daniel Chester French sculptures—*Jurisprudence* and *Commerce*—and encased the long vaulted lobby in marble. Private offices and two luxuriously ornamented courtrooms were decorated with murals depicting history, the law, even the delivery of mail.

This architectural marvel would eventually be joined by a series of other impressive civic monuments clustered around the Mall, a large rectangle of park devised as part of a 1903 City Beautiful-era plan by Brunner and architects Daniel H. Burnham and John M. Carrère.

All of the structures were of similar scale and design: the county courthouse (1912), city hall (1916), auditorium (1922), public library (1925), and board of education headquarters (1930). "Buildings that are excellent in themselves are inef-



Arnold W. Brunner's U.S. Post Office, Custom House, and Court House, an early-20th-century landmark in downtown Cleveland, has undergone a \$45 million restoration.

fective unless properly placed," Brunner declared in 1910.

Now, after years of deterioration and changing tenants—the post office, for example, moved out in 1934—the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) has restored and modernized Brunner's landmark building, reopening it in June as the Howard M. Metzenbaum U.S. Courthouse, after Ohio's former U.S. senator.

The \$45 million venture renewed the exterior and interior—from ornamental ceilings to walls, murals, fixtures, and doors—adapting the space for the U.S. Bankruptcy Court, the new main tenant. The U.S. District Court will continue to use the two ceremonial courtrooms.

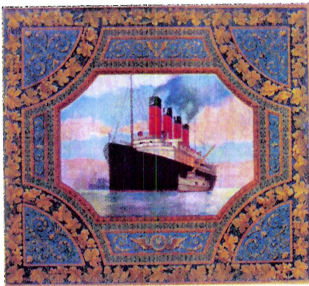
"They're strong, breathtaking rooms in the way they communicate the importance and dignity of the justice process," says Paul E. Westlake Jr., managing principal of the Cleveland firm of Westlake Reed Leskosky, the project architects. "It's architecture as a tool and a symbol."

To provide public access and secured private circulation, the central light court was converted into a covered atrium linked to the main lobby. And in accordance with GSA's commitment to environmental responsibility, the project recycled materials, whether concrete from an earlier phase of the project or pieces of original marble long stored in the basement, for use on-site or elsewhere.

A story within the story began in the elegant postmaster's office, which once featured 23 murals by Francis D. Millet illustrating mail collection and delivery worldwide, from the wintry *Dog Sled Post, Alaska* to the sandy [Continued on page 12]

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[Continued from page 10] *Camel Post, Arabia* to the sprinting mailmen of *City Delivery, India*. Removed in 1955, the murals were shunted from building to building for storage. "The most damage was caused by



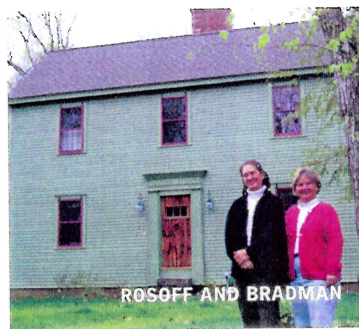
Among the murals that have been conserved are, from top to bottom: *Dog Sled Post, Alaska*; *City Delivery, India*; and *Foreign Mail Transfer, N.Y. Harbor*.

their rather hasty removal," says Robert G. Lodge, president of the McKay Lodge Conservation Laboratory in Oberlin, Ohio, which has restored the panels in a project funded by GSA's Fine Arts Program. Conservators removed loose adhesive and plaster from canvas backs before remounting the murals onto aluminum panels, cleaning the surfaces, and painting in missing areas. This "inpainting" alone, says Lodge, "demands continuous focus, sitting still, and sometimes concentrating on one small area six hours a day." In May the panels were reinstalled just off the main lobby of the courthouse, their first time ever on public view.

## WHO'S NEWS



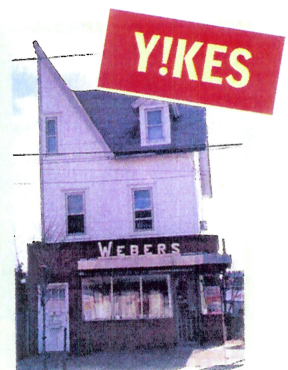
**D-Day Refloat** Walking along southern Brittany's Laïta River during a family vacation in the winter of 1996, Hugués Eliard did a double take when he recognized a boat mired in the mud. It was a Higgins boat, the landing craft American troops used in World War II to storm beaches in Europe and the Pacific. Eliard, a French businessman, spent the next eight months removing eight tons of muck from the hull, driving 325 miles each weekend from his home in suburban Paris to do so. Using only his hands and a shovel, he eventually uncovered—and refloated—the landing craft. "I grew up on war stories," Eliard says. "This was the Christmas gift of all time." Of the 20,000 Higgins boats built in New Orleans during the war years, about six are still operational today. Eliard expects to add to that number when LCVP 9386 is made seaworthy next year. "I will sail it from Rouen down the Seine on the anniversary of D-Day," he says. He wants to end up on the beaches of Normandy, where on June 6, 1944, LCVP 9386 and hundreds of boats like it brought thousands of Allied troops ashore. || **ERIK SVANE**



**Homesteaders** In 2001, Sherrill Rosoff was looking at a rundown late-18th-century house in Pepperell, Mass., unsure whether to buy it. Hoping to convince her, a resourceful real estate agent called in Holly Bradman, a designer of landscapes and interiors and an aficionado of old houses. Rosoff and Bradman quickly became friends, and sure enough, Rosoff bought the house. A year later, the women founded The Restored Homestead, a renovation company specializing in historic houses. "The houses we save belonged to the local tradespeople, farmers, and families that helped build New England's communities," says Rosoff, a former business school administrator. Their first job was the Benjamin Spaulding House—a two-story Georgian saltbox in Townsend, Mass., built between 1735 and 1765—which they bought off eBay for \$6,000. Local contractors dismantled the structure and shipped it along with three fireplaces and its beehive oven to Brookline, N.H., located six miles away. There the structure was reassembled, and modern appliances, plumbing, wiring, and insulation were added. || **CAROLYN GALGANO**

## How the other half lives, Philadelphia

Send us your Yikes! photos. If we use yours, we'll send you a *Preservation T-shirt*.



LEFT: COURTESY MCKAY LODGE CONSERVATION LABORATORY INC. (2); TOP RIGHT: HUGUÉS ELIARD; MIDDLE RIGHT: JOE PERRY; COURTESY OF THE RESTORED HOMESTEAD; BOTTOM RIGHT: JOE PERRY