



PRESERVATION PREVIEW: SPOTLIGHT ON 44TH STREET'S TERRACE PERGOLA

AN ORIGINAL FEATURE OF THE FAMED 44TH STREET CLUBHOUSE FAÇADE, THE PERGOLA TODAY IS SHOWING ITS AGE. RECENT REPAIRS HELPED ADDRESS WORRISOME FLAWS, AND NOW A DESIGN FOR AN EXTENSIVE RENOVATION IS IN THE WORKS, THE TYPE OF PROJECT THAT QUALIFIES FOR SUPPORT FROM THE NEW YORK YACHT CLUB FOUNDATION.

By Jill Connors

Architect Whitney Warren's design for the 44th Street Clubhouse received accolades from the day the building opened in 1901, with most commentary focused on the magnificent limestone façade, embellished with sculpted stone sea monsters and galleon-like windows. One element also visible from street level represented a true luxury: the fifth-floor terrace with its distinctive timber pergola. During that era, before air conditioning, a terrace provided the ultimate retreat during warm weather: a place to enjoy the cooling effects of a breeze while also remaining shaded from the sun under closely spaced pergola timbers.

A pergola, whose name comes from a Latin word meaning projecting eave, is typically a garden structure with an open wood-framed roof or canopy. At the time Warren was designing the Clubhouse, pergolas were favored by leading British and European garden designers, often featuring handsome timbers set on brick or stone pillars. For the 44th Street Clubhouse, Warren's fanciful approach resulted in a pergola placed not on the ground but five stories up, invoking the tradition of a roof garden but adding the whimsical pergola.

Fast-forward to 2023, and the terrace and pergola still function as an enchanting outdoor space in the heart of the city, but the years have taken their toll. Cracks have developed on numerous pergola timbers; this condition, known as checking, is a natural occurrence when wood is exposed to the elements.

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The 44th Street Terrace (opposite), with its pergola canopy, provides an outdoor retreat in the heart of New York City. Recent pergola attention included (above from left): engineers assessing timber condition; a crane in place for repair; accessing the far end of the timbers; reviewing initial pergola repair plans.

Stretching the entire width of the Clubhouse façade, the pergola consists of 42 individual timbers, each projecting a total length of 15 feet out from the façade. The final five-foot curved section of each timber extends above the sidewalk, some 50 feet below. In cases where cracks exist in the outermost curved section of the timbers, there is the danger of pieces falling onto the sidewalk.

When a recent inspection by New York City engineers noted that 37 of the 42 timbers required attention, New York Yacht Club Director of Facilities Julia Ruegg jumped into action and arranged for immediate repairs that included gluing, screwing, clamping and bolting the wood to ensure there was no risk of pieces of the timbers coming loose.

“This is the kind of continuous care that historic buildings need,” says 44th Street General Manager Tim McCormick. “We are fortunate that the Foundation can support such important and often urgent work.”

The New York Yacht Club Foundation was created in 2007 for the sole purpose of maintaining both of the Club’s historic properties: the 44th Street Clubhouse and Newport’s Harbour Court. Having provided more than \$8.1 million in grants for preservation projects to date, the Foundation’s support continues to be essential.

The immediate repairs to the pergola are just the beginning of the project. A complete renovation is needed to fully address

the condition. The House Committee plans to focus on commissioning a renovation design from an architect this year and then begin the process of getting design approval from New York City’s Landmarks Preservation Commission, which is necessary because the Clubhouse is a historic structure; only then can the Club proceed with the actual work.

The plan is to complete the pergola renovation before the next inspection cycle, which will happen in February 2028, as part of New York City’s Façade Inspection & Safety Program (FISP), which is also known as Local Law 11.

FISP requires that façades of all city buildings over six stories must be examined every five years to assess the condition of exterior walls and their appurtenances—elements such as signs, balconies, parapets, stone gargoyles, terra cotta ornamentation, flower boxes and even air-conditioner window units. If an unsafe element is noted during inspection, the building owners must do emergency repairs immediately and completely fix the issue by the time of the next inspection.

The pergola renovation design process will prompt examination of numerous factors, including materials and building methods. For example, there is no evidence that the original pergola ever had flashing at the point where the timbers meet the Clubhouse façade; flashing protects against water intrusion that can cause rot and decay. It is also unknown what type of wood was used for the original pergola. A subsequent renovation replaced the timbers with oak soaked in copper as a weather retardant.

The ultimate goal will be creating a pergola with the look of architect Whitney Warren’s original fetching design which can again be a vital part of the Club’s design and environment. 🇺🇸



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