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Petra Brings Old- World Charm Back To Pequot Library's Ageless Wisdom

Petra Construction recently completed a renovation with truly unique challenges. It all began 116 years ago when the Pequot Public Library constructed their building. The Library has provided a world of knowledge and wisdom in its collections ever since. When the Library Board concluded that the building's structure and interior sections needed a new vitality, they began to search for firms with experience and specialized knowledge to meet the demands of the renovation. Dan Snyder, Pequot's Executive Director, and the Library's Building Committee: Christopher Rosow, Board President, Gibney Patterson, a former builder, and David Frassinelli, a construction industry Project Manager, were a significant part of the renovation process. They met biweekly with the team to oversee the extensive details and to ensure high quality historical renovation standards.

From the architects, Tappe Associates, to Sgorbati Associates, Inc., the mechanical engineers, to Petra Construction Corporation, Pequot's Board assembled a masterful team. Petra was in charge of the management of daily operations, which presented the first obstacle - the Library Board decided to keep the facility open to the public while the renovation was carried out. This meant that, in tandem with varied construction tasks, Petra had

Original photo of the May Room showing ornamentation used as a basis for restoration work



Pequot Library front elevation

to maintain suitable air quality and public safety.

It is one thing to hold fast to a commitment; it is quite another to announce it publicly, which Dan Snyder actually did. "We have worked hard to make sure the library stays open to the public and continues to provide full library services throughout the restoration." Renovation began in the basement with the heating, cooling and ventilation systems. The installation of duct work, electrical conduits, and sprinkler piping wasn't merely a matter of fitting in; it had to achieve a result that looked attractive. Michael Sheehy Plumbing & Heating Services worked hard to ensure that was the case. Mechanical coordination required redesign, due to hidden

structural challenges and thick masonry walls. Petra's Senior Project Manager, Barry Zorzanello, put it this way, "We faced a huge challenge in restoring and preserving the historic character of the building, while bringing it up to modern levels of code compliance."

Successful projects require the ability to assemble a team of unique and proven specialists who communicate effectively. The Building Committee and the renovation team met frequently. Challenges were discussed, strong feelings were ironed out and demands clarified - making some meetings lively, but always toned with mutual respect. The collective wisdom of the group resulted in better

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solutions. The May Room, Rennell Room and Main Reading Room presented another challenge: bringing all the areas of exposed wood back to their original finish by matching the original wood finish colors. Built-in shelves were removed, revealing older architectural details. The ornate wood mantelpieces also needed to be recreated, along with mouldings and decorative architectural designs. Computer modeling helped match color finishes. A stroke of luck came about when shelving was removed, revealing some original wood boards for color samples. The Library Board was instrumental in locating a paint analyst to match color finishes. There were many attempts at dying and staining, until the color match was perfect. Petra's in-house millwork shop played no small role. Detail was based on photos of original carved ornamentation, which guided the replication of mouldings and mantelpieces, to which a master wood carver added finishing touches, including relief carving. The photographs were, indeed, a saving grace, since the fireplaces were stripped of the detailed mouldings somewhere over the years, which otherwise would have made authentic recreation impossible. The Building Committee was fortunate to locate a specialist to restore the ornate metal bookshelf ends. Jeff Hoover, Principal of Tappe Associates architects, put it this way: "There was a lot of dependence on Petra, not only to assemble the right team, but to approach this project as a comprehensive blend of renovation and restoration, when you

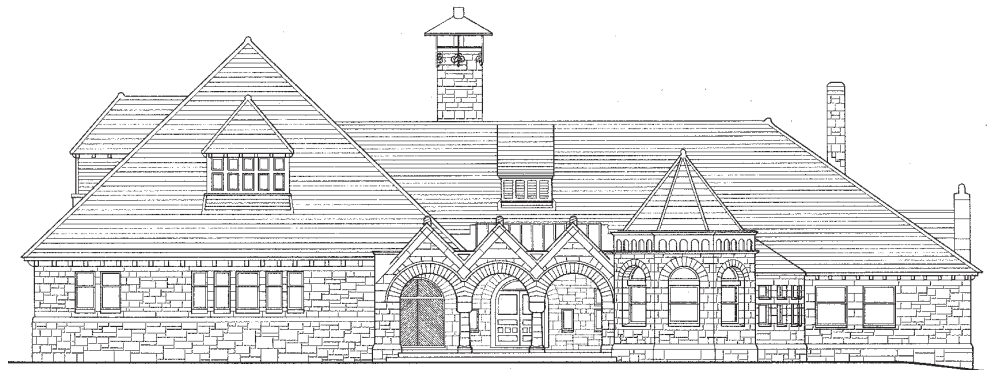
consider we went from the roof to the basement and just about everywhere in between." The glass wall separating the Rennell Room and the Main Reading Room was also restored, featuring a truly unique entrance through a curved wall.

Work on the exterior of the building was also addressed. The roof was reflashed, gutter work was completed, clay tiles were replaced, and leaking masonry was repointed. Texture and color matching were vital to ensure accurate consistency. Some original clay roof tiles were found in the basement, and the original tile manufacturer, still in business, provided replacement tiles.

Bringing a 116 year old facility into the new age was a marvelous feat of ingenuity and detail. This was especially true due to the Historic Preservation Act of 1966 which guided the project. Dan Snyder mentioned, "Petra was very open to the Board's suggestions and guidelines. They were amiable to the need, in a few cases,

to bring in other specialized experts. That attitude isn't the norm for many builders because they want to bring in their own experts. Petra's Project Superintendent, Dennis DaRe, proved to be an accommodating, experienced professional who made things happen for us." It required the ability to effectively manage a multitude of craftsmen, problems, schedules and processes, all in unison. These kinds of detail-oriented projects are difficult, and this one challenged the skills and minds of this unique group of professionals. But more than that, this project required skilled people who bring a real passion for the work they do. It has been said that, "the secrets of the world are hidden in books." At Petra, the secrets of successful projects are found in the right team with the right experience.

To discuss historic renovation or construction services, please call Guido Petra, President or Terry Wooding, Executive Vice President at 203-865-6043.



A line drawing from the American Building Survey, done in 1965

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