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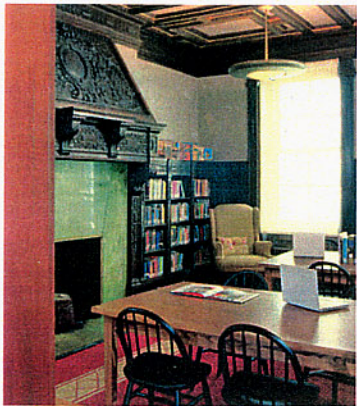
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Just Another Brick in the Wall?

Renovated historic school buildings can be as proud of their newness as they are of their history

By Linda Burnett

An old building doesn't have to be on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "most endangered historic places" list to be worthy of saving. Preventing what some have already termed a "teardown epidemic" is a way to retain a piece of history through architecture. What better architectural place is there to reinstate elements of the past than through the renovation of school buildings?



Library (above) and Science Room (right) at Marymount Middle School, New York, designed by Platt Byard Dovell White and restored by ICS Builders, Inc. Photography by Jonathan Wallen.

In the case of the Marymount Middle School on New York City's East 82nd Street, a 7,000-sq. ft. private Catholic school for girls, "The exterior was landmarked but it

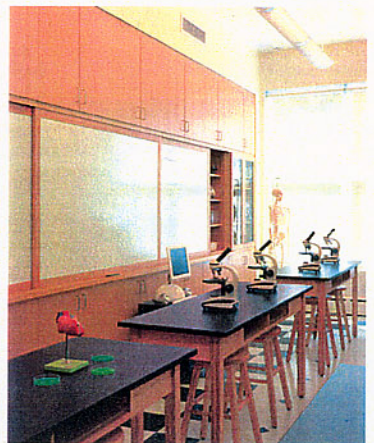
architectural elements as possible preserved and restored," says Ted O'Rourke, senior vice president at New York-based ICS Builders. The early 1900s, Beaux-Arts, mansion-like townhouse was originally a private residence and then small studio apartments before the school bought it to accommodate some 200 students ages five through 12.

The exterior's ornate limestone façade, hand-carved marble elements and detailed balcony handrails, all circa 1900, were not only part of the building's charm, they were also part of the neighborhood's past. The building was historic by age and by location. "The entire area is a landmarked district," adds O'Rourke. "Our limitations were dictated by the neighborhood and the owner's desire to continue to blend into the neighborhood. Everything had to be like the original in form and materials."

About 20 years ago, the community mobilized to protect the highly visible building from being torn down. However, now there was some opposition to the school moving in. The area, which it shares with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, already attracts great foot and car traffic; some worried the school would only add to the congestion. The architect and builder helped ensure that the school would be a good neighbor and that the building would be renovated to meet its

"The school was looking for a mansion with these architectural characteristics," says Samuel White, principal at the architectural firm Platt Byard Dovell White in New York. "It was part of its culture already.

"You try to find the DNA, the genetic code of the building, and then find the harmony between the DNA and the space's program," says White. "If you do that, then you can preserve aspects without fighting the building." White also advises "not to be afraid to change the building. Don't be awed by the craftsmanship of an old building.



The happiest relationship is to clean up the old part and make it look uncompromised and then identify and acknowledge what needs to be new and juxtapose the two."