

Louis Armstrong House Museum

Preservation, Cultural

Client
Louis Armstrong House Museum

Location
24-56 107th Street
Corona, New York

Year
Completed: 2003

The restoration of the Louis Armstrong house transformed a modest private dwelling into a public house museum that is a principal destination along New York's famous "Jazz Trail". The project reanimated the early twentieth century structure with the spirit of one of America's greatest musicians. The completed project represents an accumulation of unusual details, all in the service of a technical restoration of a vernacular twentieth century house and its exceptionally exuberant interior.



Awards

Excellence in Historic Preservation Award
Preservation League of New York State, 2004

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Our goal was to recreate the architecture and atmosphere of Satchmo's occupancy, filled with details of the private life of one of music's most visible personalities. At the same time, the level of amenities and exhibits required to accommodate new public access, as well as life safety improvements, could easily overwhelm the ordinary scale and extraordinary interiors that generate the magic of the place. The challenge of the restoration was to introduce these interventions seamlessly, with minimal visible impact.

Lucille's garden was restored and a third floor that had been added in the late 1970's was removed, returning the house and grounds to the form present during Louis's lifetime. An accessible restroom was constructed in a storage closet, display cases for exhibits installed in closets along a wall of the basement recreation room, and the garage (which had housed a succession of Louis's beloved Cadillac sedans) was converted to a visitors' center and museum shop.

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In addition to what are rather common restoration techniques, the age and characteristics of the house required several unusual efforts. Invisible speakers, playing recordings made by Armstrong of daily life in the house, were incorporated in several rooms to add a unique interpretative experience; everyday 20th century materials such as laminates, Formica, linoleum, and the electric-blue enameled kitchen cabinets were restored to their original condition; modern furniture and fabrics were repaired and conserved; reproduction wallpaper was produced to match the original silver foil wallpaper in the basement; and tropical patterned fabric was printed to match existing upholstery.