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May 17, 2010

Magnificent 1883 Beaux Art Mural Endangered by Chelsea Hotel Demolition

It has come to our attention that the Chelsea Hotel management plans to punch a hole through the ceiling of Star Lounge in the basement and up through the floor of Stanley's office (to the west of the lobby), [in an apparent attempt to extend the raucous club up into the lobby area.](#)

Our main concern at this point is for the structural integrity of the building, and especially for the fate of the magnificent Beaux Art mural on the ceiling of Stanley's office, an original feature of the hotel, built in 1883. Other original features of the office include the marble floor and two fire places. Obviously, any disturbance to the floor or the walls of the office threatens to destabilize the ceiling, which likely would result in irreparable tears to the mural, which is actually a large painted canvas that has been stretched and affixed to the ornate ceiling. (As you can see, there are several matching canvases affixed to the surrounding walls.) Furthermore, dust from the demolition is likely to damage the mural if great care is not taken to protect it.



As part of his ambitious ten-year renovation project for the hotel, Stanley Bard had the mural restored in 2000. We have been in contact with the restorer, Lisa Rosen of Fine Art Restoration, who writes to describe the costly and laborious process:

"The painting was obfuscated with 129 years of New York City smog, soot, nicotine and surface dirt. The once transparent final layer of protective varnish had also altered, turning first yellow and then brown (see photo). The restorative cleaning procedure took five weeks of intensive physical labor using 'q-tip's' and idoneous solvent to finally arrive at what you see today. What you see now is how the painted canvas looked originally leaving the master's studio before being adhered to the hotel ceiling.



In the 1880's the height of chic was to hire Italian artists to come to New York City and decorate the splendid private mansions and elegant hotels of the Belle Epoque. America was striving to keep up and prove itself with Old World style. These artists were also responsible for the interior decorations of the historical villas in Newport, R.I..

The Chelsea Hotel is a perfect example of the New World imitating Old World luxury. Stanley Bard's former office in fact had originally been the Ladies Powder Room. The painted ceiling, the stucco decorations and even the stained glass in the windows of Bard's former office reflect the suave elegance that the hotel represented."



As you can see by the before and after pictures, Rosen has done a great job. It would be a shame if this irreparable mural were lost due to careless and/or malicious action on the part of hotel management, who might have other ideas about what a chi-chi club should look like.

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