

St. Patrick's Cathedral New York Murphy Burnham & Buttrick Architects

Anyone walking past New York's landmark St. Patrick's Cathedral cannot help but wonder at the way it has suddenly taken on an almost luminous gleam—a startling shift from its former gunmetal gray, closer to the typical hue of Manhattan's granite office towers. The church's new look can be credited to New York's Murphy Burnham & Buttrick Architects, the firm that oversaw a massive renovation over the course of the last three years. Originally the work of pioneering Gothic revivalist James Renwick Jr., the building has long served as an iconic backdrop for statesmen and popes (including the current one, who reopened it last fall) since its completion in 1888, but it has also suffered all of the attendant stresses, overuse, and exposure to the urban elements. Decorative columns were riven with cracks; mechanical elements had become outdated; and, of course, the city had done its exhaust-choked best to darken the façade. All of this called for a comprehensive restoration, the building's first since the 1940s, that would eventually draw in nearly 200 specialists and outside consultants at a total cost of \$177 million. On the exterior, micro-abrasion techniques cleaned the façade, smoothed concrete patches, and repointed ornamental details; inside, the plastered ceiling was repainted a pristine white, and new fire-safety systems were installed that blend almost invisibly with the existing interior. In total, more than 30,000 individual repairs were undertaken, each one meticulously checked against Renwick's original design, transforming a building that seemed so familiar to so many into something no one had seen for a century and more.

