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# Inspired by history and fashion

Motivated by the resurgence of the Fashion District and the building's unique history, an architectural team restored the ornate facade of the base of New York City's Fashion Tower, while sensitively incorporating a contemporary stone lobby

BY JASON KAMERY

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FREIGHT

Originally designed by Emery Roth in the mid-1920s, the Fashion Tower is an Art Deco-era skyscraper in New York's Garment District. Located in what was once the epicenter of American clothing design and manufacturing, the Fashion Tower is unique both for its ornamental motifs referencing the apparel industry and for having been occupied continuously by the garment trade. The building's current owner wanted to celebrate the Fashion Tower's past, while repositioning the building with the addition of a contemporary lobby. GRT Architects LLP, located in New York, NY, proposed a literal restoration of the natural stone entryway as well as a clear new design

for the lobby, which echoed the motifs and materials found in the building's stylized Art Deco exterior.

Inside and out, natural stone was crucial to the architect for the look and feel of this project. Along with the Calacatta Regina marble used on the inside, a Pietra D'Avola limestone was used on the outside of the building. "Earlier renovations had obscured the stone façade and destroyed detailing at the entry," said Rustam Mehta, partner at GRT Architects. "Referencing archival drawings, we restored the entryway to its former beauty. Ornament - including two polychrome panels with peacock motifs - was recreated in sandstone and terracotta by skilled craftsmen under GRT's

direction. A sensitive façade cleaning also uncovered figured sandstone cladding.

For the inside, GRT removed a storage mezzanine to create an expanded double-height lobby clad in pleated Calacatta Regina. "This folded marble wall references pleated fabric and fluted Art Deco motifs," said Mehta. "CNC fabrication, combined with on-site handcraft, was used to realize this sensuous surface. Drawing upon the building's history to create a new identity, the renovation reasserts the importance of fashion and style in a changing neighborhood."

A total of 1,100 square feet of stone was used for the interior portion of the project; each piece was a trapezoid measuring

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For the inside of the Fashion Town New York, GRT removed a storage mezzanine to create an expanded double-height lobby clad in pleated Calacatta Regina. "This folded marble wall references pleated fabric and fluted Art Deco motifs," said Rustam Mehta, partner at GRT Architects.

approximately 3 feet, 9 inches x 2 feet. "We wanted to accentuate the geometry of the pleated wall we designed, so we were looking for a stone with character but without overly graphic large-scale figuration that might distract from the three dimensional qualities of the wall," said Mehta. "Calacatta Regina provided a desirable balance of beautiful veining and subtle color shifts."

The stone was supplied by Walker Zanger located in Perth Amboy, NJ. The project started in December 2012 when the installer came to Walker Zanger with a rendering of the project and asked them to recommend ideas for the stone they could use. "We then talked to the architect, and we showed them some pictures and then had GRT come to the warehouse to look at stones," said

Jonathan Zanger, president of Walker Zanger. "The architect had a very particular idea of how this project should look. They were restoring limestone on the outside, and they wanted the inside to really open up, make it much more modern and to have some kind of connection to the outside. There are carvings on the outside from the mid-century regarding the fashion business,



The architectural team relied on archival drawings to revive the building's entryway, which features sandstone and terracotta.

so the inside was to have some kind of connection to that.

"Since the wall is supposed to be a pleated wall and that was a focal point of the whole lobby, we had to give them a white stone that could hold an edge," Zanger went on to say. "They wanted a stone with some veining, but didn't want it to be overpowering. The idea was the shape should be the major element, but they wanted it to look like stone, so it couldn't be pure white."

The fabrication of the stone was done by Rugo Stone, LLC, located in Lorton, VA. According to the architect, the geometry of the wall is very complex and required numerous complex miters. "During the course of the project, the entire team debated a number of production, transportation and erection strategies that would keep the design as true to concept as possible, while allowing for efficient installation."



SITU Fabrication, located in Brooklyn, NY, came up with the idea to make wooden forms that would attach the stone directly to the wall. "They came up with a typical form and then we shipped it down to Rugo Stone in Virginia," said Zanger. "We shipped the forms and some slabs down to Rugo Stone so they could make a mock-up. We did this one by one so the veining would match. The forms are taller than the slabs, so we had to use about two slabs to make the height, but we wanted to nest the panels into the slabs so that we were using the maximum amount of slab, because it is an expensive material, and we didn't want to waste too much of it. After the pieces were manufactured, they were shipped back up to New York. The forms

went into the lobby and these pieces were attached to the wooden frames."

GRT Architects visited Rugo Stone and the offices of SITU also to review the mockups. "During the time we spent making mock-ups, 3D simulations and reviewing shop drawings allowed field installations to go very smoothly," said Mehta. "We worked with the firm who pre-fabricated many panels with well-engineered joints so installation was a smooth process."

The project has won a Marble Institute of America Pinnacle Award of Excellence in the category of Renovation/Restoration. It has also won an AIA NYS Award for Adaptive Reuse and Historic preservation. "At our first design meeting we proposed the 'pleated' wall, but thought it would be too difficult and too

costly to execute in marble, so we proposed wood paneling," said Mehta. "Our client asked us what we'd do if cost was no object, and we said we'd assemble the best team possible and execute the wall in white marble. Thanks to their vision and some very good collaborators, we were able to pull the design off and are very proud of it." ■

**Fashion Tower New York  
New York, NY**

**Architect:** GRT Architects LLP, New York, NY

**Stone Installer:** SITU Fabrication, Brooklyn, NY

**Stone Supplier:** Walker Zanger, Perth Amboy, NJ,  
(Calacatta Regina marble and Pietra D'Avola limestone)

**Stone Fabricator:** Rugo Stone, LLC, Lorton, VA



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