



TRUSTED LITURGICAL DESIGNERS,
ARTISTS AND ARTISANS FOR OVER HALF A CENTURY

Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral New York, NY



OVERVIEW

Under Rolf's direction, the historic Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral in Lower Manhattan was restored just in time for its 200th anniversary. With its cornerstone set in 1809, New York's first Cathedral—the second Catholic church in Manhattan, and the third in all of New York state—is still considered a treasure by the Archdiocese of New York and people throughout the world. It also contains the only Catholic cemetery and catacombs in all of New York City where several of the original 22 Catholics who petitioned the French government to open a Catholic church in New York are resting in peace.

When the pastor of the Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral began the painstaking process of restoring his 200-year-old dual landmark church, he called upon trusted Liturgical Design Consultant Rolf Rohn. He was very impressed with Rolf's experience and work portfolio and felt comfortable that he would conduct a thorough assessment and provide the appropriate guidance on how to approach the project.

Nestled in the heart of the trendy Soho and Northern Little Italy districts of Manhattan, the Basilica required a considerable amount of work to mitigate and prevent further deterioration. In addition to required infrastructure and functional updates, exquisite 19th century architectural details needed to be restored to perfection. Knowing full well that restoring a 200-year-old building can be filled with surprises, Rolf carefully developed a master plan and execution strategy to ensure minimal interruption to Mass schedules, integrating the vision of the pastor with liturgical guidelines, all while meeting the strict and demanding codes and regulations of the New York City Building Department and New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rolf's master plan included a complete interior restoration of the Basilica including the sanctuary, flooring, walls, vaulted ceilings, compromised cast architectural details, lighting, stained glass windows, all of the statuary, early 1800s carved reredos, testers, Stations of the Cross, pews, narthex, catacombs, undercroft and restrooms, as well as the creation of a dedicated chapel to Our Lady of Altgracia at the left side of the Sanctuary where the sacristy once stood.

PROJECT EXECUTION

Rolf conducted a thorough evaluation of the church structure including an extensive array of high-definition architectural scans that enabled his team to uncover aspects of the Basilica that would be otherwise invisible to the naked eye. This detailed scanned blueprint of the "Old Cathedral" determined structural limitations and conditions that would need to be addressed in order to prepare this sacred building for another 200 years and restore it to its original splendor. Rolf provided meticulous guidance, using multidisciplinary and specialty teams that combined state-of-the-art technology with Old World artistry and craftsmanship.



- The renovation began where it should—from the altar out: a magnificent replica of the Neo-Gothic style altar replaced the timeworn old one and majestically serves as the focal point of the interior.
- Designs were conceptualized for a renovated sanctuary, sacristy, chapel and gathering space, and then implemented. This included a new tabernacle throne to match the altar, while the tabernacle and tester were reintroduced as they appeared in the early 19th century.
- The late 1800s baptismal font was completely restored and refinished to match the other liturgical furnishings.
- The massive stained glass Gothic windows and their deteriorated wooden window frames were restored (including installing new protection glass).
- In addition, Rolf designed and installed new lighting, flooring, modern heating/cooling systems and an elevator for accessibility to all levels.
- A major part of the renovation included the restoration of a priceless Erben organ.
- After five intensive years studying the finishes of major cathedrals and basilicas throughout Europe with Monsignor Sakano, Rohn Custom Studio Liturgical Interior Designer Kathy Maglicco—working with a team of artists and painters—completed the sample work for the color scheme and decorating plan. High up on scaffolding, they worked hand-in-hand to ensure perfection in each detail of the faux finishes meant to create the ambiance of a beautifully aged building. Special care was taken in custom mixing harmonious paints and glazes to awaken the magnificent architectural detailing that lay dormant under a century of dust and dirt.
- Rolf's work did not stop aboveground; he retooled preliminary plans to revive the tradition of Christian burial under the church in the catacombs with the introduction of the columbaria. Rolf improved plans by introducing an environment in character with the upper Cathedral area as well as increasing the number of potential interments by adding niches around existing family crypts, thereby growing potential revenue opportunities for the Basilica.
- A comprehensive landscaping of the exterior cemetery grounds with newly designed columbaria, nestled between the crypts of bishops, priests and various others buried there in the 1800s, will complete the project.

COMPLETED PROJECT

The Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral, the sacred building in which the first Cardinal in the western hemisphere was installed, is now a renewed testimony of faith - a liturgically correct representation of our Catholic beliefs with a renewed spirit and a legacy for future generations.



