

Learning Places Summer 2016

Grand Central Terminal



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INTRODUCTION

Grand Central Terminal located in 42nd street Park avenue New York has become more than just a site for unloading and loading commuters, but arguably perhaps one the most iconic and visited landmark that represent New York City's architecture today. The development of grand central terminal has undergone through several personality changes from its initial "Depo" design which opened its doors to commuters in 1897 and it's current design which was finalized in 1913. Within those 16 years of change the station that we know today not only has changed in nomenclature, but also in design and use.

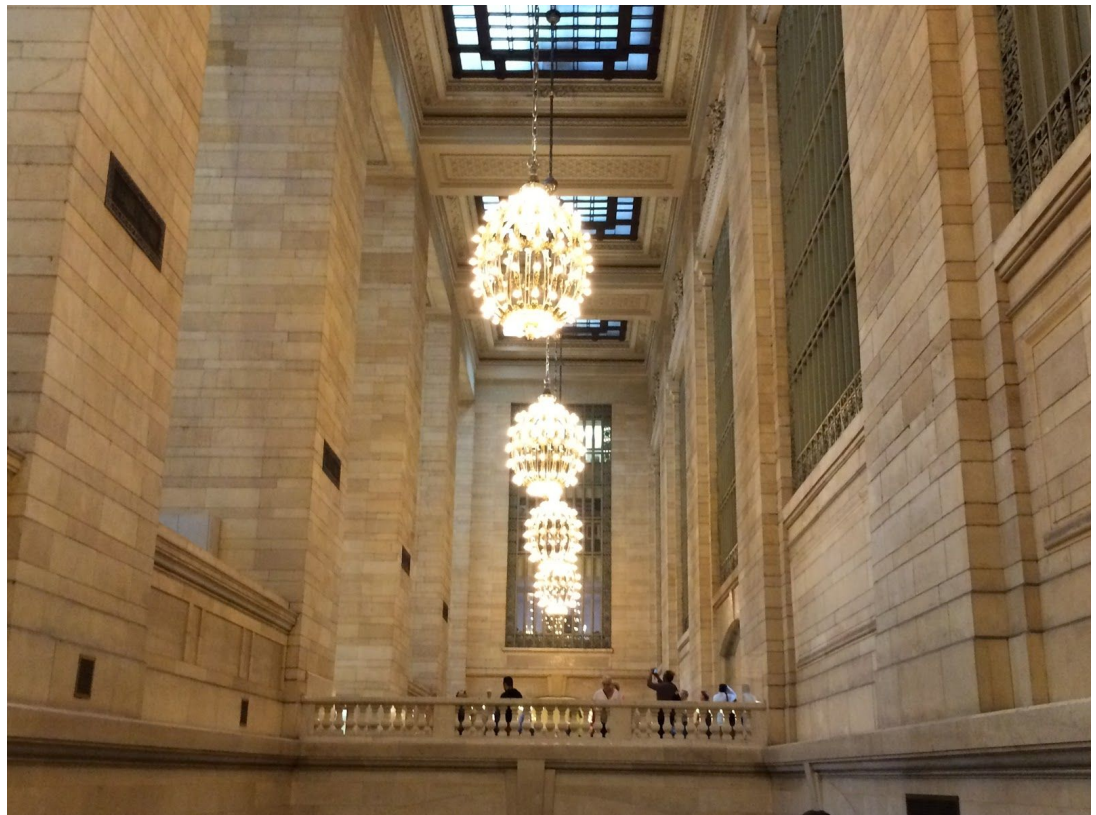
Much of the structures seen today were a direct consequence of the the gilded era after the civil war. During this time period an influx of european architectural influences was being established in NYC designs. Many of the landmarks we see today are a consequence of the Beaux Art which is a neoclassical design style that was being taught at the "ecole des beaux art" in Paris, France. Stanford White who is no stranger to this style contributed many of the beautiful structures we see today. Although Grand Central was not designed by Mr. White, much of these very intricate and detailed style of architect can be seen at Grand Central Terminal.

We visited grand central terminal twice as a group. On the first visit we learned and study grand central on the macroscopic level by observing the architecture and its compartments. The second visit was provided by a tour guide who gave us a microscopic insight of the building's history and secrets.

“Flashy Lights”



The chandeliers were purposely design to have its light bulb protruding outward to yell to the public how advanced this building was by making it entirely run on electricity. Interesting enough if one looks closely one of the light bulbs is actually burned out.



“Insignia: Acorn”



Highlighted in the many small detailed hand crafted vessels is the Vanderbilts’ insignia the acorn. I find this to be very nostalgic and symbolic of New York City. When we think of NYC we normally think of the cold and long grey winters as oppose to the bright, but short summer days. The acorn I find to be a symbol of autumn which is an aesthetically pleasing season as we see parks filled with an array of colors as trees begin to burst with red, yellow and orange colors. This transition between leafs as they stop producing their green pigment chlorophyll and begin to prepare for the harsh winter days is symbolic of the acorn which represents NYC.

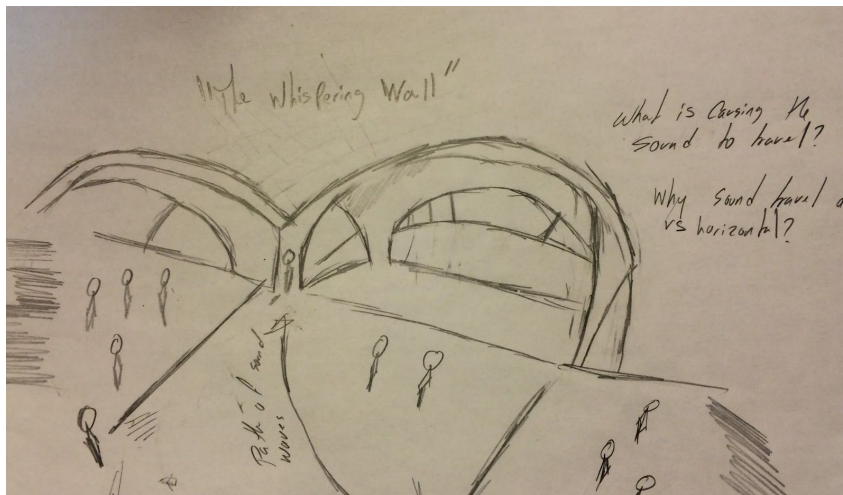


“Dirty Rooftop”



In this picture I am trying to highlight the residue of what once use to be the rooftop over the main concourse in grand central terminal. I find this image interesting because prior to the guided tour that small dark speckle viewing from the bottom up it appears as if a piece of the crest is missing and definitely doesn't appear as cigarette residue. More importantly I like the fact that this small section was left without cleaning to remind us of this filth that once stood over our heads and more importantly remind us that it is our duty to preserve and respect this body of work.

“The Whispering wall”



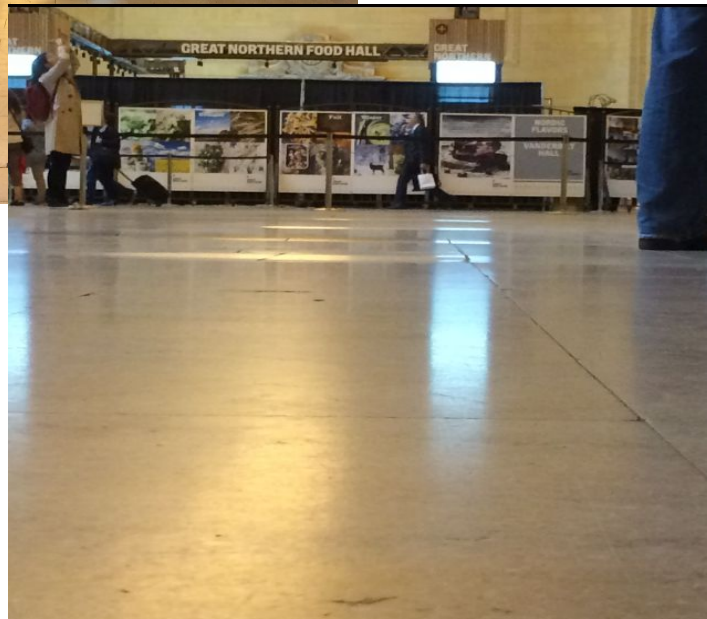
The whispering wall or talking wall is one of my favorite and mind boggling phenomena of grand central terminal. I am curious to

know how the sound vibrations can travel so clearly across the opposite end giving that it is traveling over concrete? I wondering if this was purposely designed, which I highly doubt. I wonder if the first person to who “discovered” this was spooked out by the wall’s resonance.

“House of the homeless”



If you tell someone that not so long ago this room was once filled with the homeless they will look at you with eyes of disbelief. The small indentations seen in this image are the last remnant of this truth as benches once stood over this area, but were then removed mainly due to influx of homeless individual seeking shelter.



DISCOVERIES

As a borned and raised resident of NYC I must sadly admit that I have neglected Grand Central Terminal's rich history for many years. I can say without a doubt that as New Yorkers we are always "on the go". The city has deeply rooted this in our genome and has become part of our personality and consequently neglecting our city's secrets. Now I am not new to Grand Central Terminal; I have walked through this station numerous times, but never have I stopped to observe and learn about its history up until the guided tour.

The guided tour was very informative and practically every ounce of information shared was new to me. Right off the bat I learned that the ceiling was at one point covered with nicotine and tar, which created a black musk hindering the celestial view of the vaulted ceiling. This black musk at the time covered the constellations that we now see today, and was due to a byproduct of the cigarette smoke. There is a short section in the right lower region of this rooftop, which still has a short remnant of the black tar that once covered it and to the naked eye may just seem like a misplaced tile. The constellations themselves are actually on the reverse direction(left to right), which our tour guide explained as he stated that a traveller once wrote a letter to the Vanderbilt's expressing the huge fatal error he saw in the painting.

Another interesting artifact that I learned, but wasn't shocked by was that there was a secret subway compartment build for president Roosevelt. Roosevelt used this secret train to travel in and out the city and to hide from the public that he was affected by the polio virus. If I was on the design team for the building of Grand Station Terminal I without a doubt will have also incorporated secret tunnels in its design

Although many of these secrets and information can be easily found in books and over the internet nothing, however, can fully express the feeling one gets from viewing down over the main concourse while standing over the highest region of the building evoking a god like complex. The station is always crowded with tourist and commuters, it was very interesting viewing them as they mingled, rush by one another and went about their day and at that moment I can say I felt like I was the keeper of the station. I was no longer the tourist, but the observer looking down on people with their wondrous expression, and possibly thinking how they too can get up here.

KeyWords

City beautiful movement: Was an architectural reformation period in North America with the intent of introducing beautification and monumental grandeur in cities.

Beaux-Arts: Is an architectural style that embodies historic forms and rich decorative detail

Neoclassical movement: Is an an architectural style derived from the architecture of classical antiquity, the Vitruvian principles, and the work of the Italian.

Cornelius Vanderbilt: Known as the “Commodore” was an American businessman who made his wealth in railroads

John Snook : Architect who designed Grand central depot

Warren and Wetmore: Were the architects responsible for the current Grand Central Terminal

Rafael Guastavino: Spanish architect credited for the “Tile arch system” his work can be seen at the whispering hall in Grand Central Terminal.

Stanford White: Was an American architect who was the forefront of Beaux-arts. His work can be seen all over NYC.

Works Cited

Keywords

Merriam-Webster. (2016). Retrieved June 27, 2016, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>