



National Academy of Sciences Finishes Investigation

WASHINGTON, DC

The National Academy of Sciences is located along the National Mall in Washington, DC. Designed by Bertram Goodhue, it was completed in 1924. Intended to stand as a "Temple of Science", this classically-inspired building makes numerous historic references, evident in the Greek-text entablature, anthemion crenellation along the roofline, and relevance to the nearby Lincoln Memorial. The monumental white marble building is enlivened by a sophisticated decorative scheme, both inside and out. Most notably, this includes the substantial use of decorative bronze doors, windows and grilles.

However, after decades of exposure, exterior bronze patinas had begun to degrade or fail. Several additions to the building in the 1960s-70s left the building-wide decorative scheme looking inconsistent. Previous efforts to clean and/or selectively repatinate metals significantly disrupted the extant finishes. An obvious faux finish on interior grilles left the client wondering if the metalwork was even bronze.

We were contracted in 2009 to perform a finishes investigation and mock-ups. A variety of tests were performed to identify original finishes, demonstrate refinishing options, and generate treatment recommendations. Paint was carefully removed layer by layer from interior grilles to determine the sequence of finishes present. Multiple patina samples were prepared on exterior bronze, using both hot and cold chemical applications. A variety of protective coatings, including waxes and lacquer were also illustrated. We synthesized information gathered through research, historic documentation, testing, and mock-ups into a conservation assessment report which made recommendations for replicating the finishes and also included budgetary cost estimates to implement the work.

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