

Creative Conversion

[\(http://gvshp.org/blog/2012/01/20/creative-conversion/\)](http://gvshp.org/blog/2012/01/20/creative-conversion/)

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<http://gvshp.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/renovated-view-from-MacDougal-Alley1.jpg>

View from MacDougal Alley

In an earlier post we cleared up some [common misconceptions](http://gvshp.org/blog/2011/07/20/landmarking-101-common-misconceptions/)

[\(http://gvshp.org/blog/2011/07/20/landmarking-101-common-misconceptions/\)](http://gvshp.org/blog/2011/07/20/landmarking-101-common-misconceptions/) about landmarking, one of which is the notion that landmarking "freezes a building in time." Every Tuesday the Landmarks Preservation

Commission meets to review and work with architects on major alterations to historic buildings. We find it especially gratifying to see creative conversions that satisfy both the building owner and the historic context of a neighborhood. The building at 171-173 MacDougal Street is one such conversion.

Owned by the [Tenth Church of Christ Scientist](http://tenthchurchnyc.com/index.html) (<http://tenthchurchnyc.com/index.html>) since 1927, the building has been altered substantially since it became part of the Greenwich Village Historic District in 1969. The original Romanesque building was designed by Renwick-Aspenwall and Russell Architects in 1890-1891.

The first redesign of the original building came in 1966. It was a radical conversion by architect Victor Christ-Janer. The modernist design emphasized the grand scale of this loft-style building, creating a solid red-brick exterior with only a single narrow window. In 1969, when the Landmarks Preservation designated the Greenwich Village Historic District, they described Christ-Janer's design as "handsome but severely simple" (for more, see Part 1 of the [Greenwich Village designation report](#) (http://www.gvshp.org/gvshp/resources/his_dist_sites.htm#GV), available on our [Resources page](#) (http://www.gvshp.org/gvshp/resources/his_dist_sites.htm#GV)).



<http://gvshp.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/old-middle.jpg>

Original facade from the c. 1940 tax photo (left); 1966 Christ-Janer alteration (right)

The second restoration was completed in 2009, and was initiated by the Tenth Church of Christ Scientist's need to make necessary improvements to the church. They sold the upper portion of the building—which had been unused for many years—to a developer to help finance the costs.



<http://gvshp.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/facade-removal11.jpg>

The modernist facade being removed

The 2009 renovation is an exceptional example of a sensitive re-imagining that integrates modern elements into the original façade while satisfying the needs of both owners. The two lower floors are veiled with a glass curtain wall that helps identify the public nature of the church's street-level space, while the upper residential floors take full advantage of the surviving pilasters and arches, with new windows that reinterpret the original design. The new cast glass cornice memorializes the Romanesque cornice that was removed in 1966, but is updated using modern materials.

The renovation involved the successful cooperation of many players, including the architecture and design firm [TRA Studio \(http://trastudio.com/\)](http://trastudio.com/), who headed the project for the developer, Property Markets Group; [Hanrahan Meyers Architects \(http://www.hanrahanmeyers.com/\)](http://www.hanrahanmeyers.com/) for the Church; architectural firm [Walter B. Melvin Architect \(http://www.wbmelvin.com/\)](http://www.wbmelvin.com/), who oversaw historic preservation of the remaining masonry; and the preservation contracting company [Preserv, Inc \(http://www.preservinc.com/\)](http://www.preservinc.com/). The community was so enamored with the conversion that the project team was awarded a Regina Kellerman Award at GVSHP's 2009 [Annual Awards \(http://www.gvshp.org/gvshp/events/awards.htm\)](http://www.gvshp.org/gvshp/events/awards.htm) – a happy ending for this wonderful Greenwich Village landmark conversion.