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Back from the Abyss: Restoration Resurrects Once-Proud Mansion

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By *Joe Maty*

Editor, Durability + Design

The historic but long-neglected McCormick-Goodhart Mansion in Langley Park, Md., a Georgian revival landmark and remnant of the area's rural past, has been rescued from a state of serious decay and damage in a major restoration program directed by architect Ward Bucher of Bucher/Borges Group PLLC, Easton, Md.

The architectural team restored wood floors and plasterwork throughout the building, with special attention given to the first-floor restoration, including plaster strapwork on the reading room's Tudor-style groin-vault ceiling; a massive, one-foot deep plaster ceiling in the former ballroom; charred and missing oak linenfold paneling in the lobby; and missing trimwork and fluted columns in the former dining room. The missing Classical-style balustrade and piers were replicated and interpreted in a modern idiom on the addition.



Ken Wyner Photography
The McCormick-Goodhart Mansion, Langley Park, Md.

The property, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, has been converted to use as a multicultural center for the immigrant group Casa de Maryland and related service organizations. The 19,000-square-foot, three-story landmark located in Maryland's Prince George's County was once part of the 565-acre McCormick-Goodhart family estate, owned by Lord Frederick McCormick-Goodhart and Henrietta McCormick-Goodhart. She was the granddaughter of Robert McCormick, inventor of the mechanical reaper.

Eclectic architectural heritage

Architect George Oakley Totten Jr. designed the Langley Park mansion in 1924, replacing a farmhouse destroyed by fire. Featuring Georgian Revival style architecture with a two-story portico, the building interior contained Tudor style and Beaux Arts-style rooms.

Following Henrietta McCormick-Goodhart's death in 1939, the Langley Park estate was sold off in chunks. The mansion, located at the core of a 25-acre garden apartment complex, lived on as a seminary for a Catholic order from Canada, then a Montessori school, and finally a child-care center before the CASA de Maryland social service agency received the property in 2008 as a donation from the owners, Sawyer Properties.

But while vacant, the building suffered severe deterioration due to years of heavy water damage, vandalism and neglect.

Bucher/Borges Group sought to preserve the historic quality of the mansion while incorporating elements of Latin American culture in the design. The restoration of the existing mansion provides office, conferencing and community space for CASA de Maryland, while a new addition with a green roof on the rear of the existing building houses a multipurpose room.

Teaming with Bucher/Borges Group were general contractor Hamel Commercial Builders, Elkridge, Md.; plasterwork contractor Hayles & Howe Inc., Baltimore; and painting contractor J&F Construction Inc., Columbia, Md. John Hamel of Hamel Builders served as project manager; representing the owner was Mark Stevens, Stevens Builders Inc., Dayton, Md.



Ward Bucher
The mansion was in a serious state of disrepair when the restoration program was initiated.



Ward Bucher
The library and office areas as they appeared prior to the restoration.

A daunting rescue mission



Ward Bucher

Bucher, the project architect, said the project team faced a daunting task when the restoration program was initiated in 2006. Ornamental plaster ceilings had been heavily damaged by broken internal rain leaders, "so there was a waterfall in the corners every time it rained," he said.

In the former first-floor living room of the house, converted to an open office, the original plaster was approximately a foot thick with bas-relief decorative panels bordered with egg-and-dart moldings, garlands of fruit and flowers, and rods bound with ribbons.

"This room was especially dangerous before we started, as large chunks of plaster fell down randomly," Bucher said. "The structure and plaster were in such bad condition that it could not be saved." The work included removing the hung ceiling grid and faux-pine paneling; making structural repairs and installing HVAC pipes for the floor above; installing furring, blocking and a drywall ceiling; skim coating the drywall with plaster; and installing the new decorative plaster.



Ken Wyner Photography
The original first-floor library, now the library/conference room, features a groin vault decorated with plaster strapwork in the style of an English Tudor mansion.

Small sections of the old plaster were taken to the shop of Hayles and Howe in Baltimore. The originals were stripped of paint, coated with a sealer, and covered with a flexible polyurethane. The mold was then used to make several short sections that were joined to make new pieces about five feet long. The new plaster castings were installed separated by small gaps that were then filled in the field.

The original first-floor library, now the library/conference room, features a groin vault decorated with plaster strapwork in the style of an English Tudor mansion. "This was appropriate because Lord Frederick Goodhart had a Tudor mansion back in England," Bucher said.

Elsewhere, a variety of finishes and coatings were employed in the interior and exterior restoration program, including:

- Traditional shellac on new and restored oak paneling;
- Coatings on restored ornamental and structural cast concrete;
- Polyurethane finishes on restored parquet flooring;
- Low-VOC liquid-applied membrane waterproofing on new concrete foundations;
- Exposed sprayed-on acoustical insulation; and
- Synthetic stucco applied to the exterior of the addition



The renovated McCormick-Goodhart Mansion serves as the new headquarters for the CASA de Maryland Multicultural Center, a group dedicated to providing resources and opportunities for low-income immigrants and their families, many of whom are Hispanic. The interior architecture of the facility's multi-purpose room used the symbol of the world tree to provide a link to the Latin American culture supported by the immigrant advocacy center.



Bucher/Borges Group PLLC is a boutique firm with a varied portfolio of commercial and residential project types. The firm says it focuses on "high-quality design suited to the needs of the client," and describes itself as "passionate about both preserving our cultural heritage and creating new cultural contributions."

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Ken Wyner Photography
The restoration program involved significant reconstruction of the first-floor living room, converted to an open office area. The work included removal of the hung ceiling grid and faux-pine paneling; making structural repairs and installing HVAC pipes for the

