

The New Morgan Library's Building Is Cool...

By Ada Louise Huxtable

The new Morgan Library, now called the Morgan Library and Museum—reconceived, reorganized and reopened at the end of April after a three-year, \$106 million makeover—is cool, in every sense of the word. There is not a false step in this aesthetically sensitive and admirably rational expansion. It is cool in its understated excellence, its laid-back drama, the refinement of its details. It manages to speak of money and magnificence in the coolly understated way that has become the hallmark of the upscale institutions of our time.

The old Morgan Library was hot—unashamed of its extravagance, its ostentation, its lush velvets, marbles and bronzes, its overt display of wealth and personal taste. Discretion was not the issue. For generations, New Yorkers have remained respectfully behind the velvet rope of the famous financier's red damask-walled office with its priceless paintings and objets d'art, transfixed by the notoriously penetrating gaze of J.P. Morgan, Pierpont Morgan's son and successor, dominating the room from the portrait above the ornate fireplace, behind the massive desk. A short trip across the elaborate Roman entrance rotunda took one to the equally impressive book-walled library and reading room. On bad days, the Morgan's somber splendor was a magical escape into a powerful and privileged world, providing refuge, restorative and a refreshing cup of tea.

In the new Morgan Library and Museum the velvet rope is down. You can enter the room now, but the temperature has dropped several degrees. With the emphasis on the superb collection of rare books, manuscripts and works of art, and more extensive exhibitions in an expanded and reconstituted institution, the balance has shifted from the powerful Morgan personality to the sleek elegance and smooth efficiencies of the 21st-century museum. Gone are the peculiarities and quirkiness that drove directors and curators mad.

In 1902, when Pierpont Morgan sought an architect for his library, the place to go was the firm of McKim, Mead and White. If you were fashionably inclined, you hired Stanford White; if you were solidly old guard, you used the überestablishment Charles Follen McKim. McKim's building for Morgan, completed in 1906, on 36th Street between Madison and Park avenues, was as classically correct and richly Roman as money could make it.

By 1928, a second structure ("the Annex"), a somewhat dry and denatured classical building by Benjamin Wistar Morris—the Establishment architect of choice by then—was added at the corner of Madison and 36th Street. With the Morgan residence, a brownstone on the corner of 37th Street, built in 1852 and enlarged in 1888, this construction completed the Madison Avenue frontage of the block. Ad hoc additions were made over the following decades that did little to solve increasing problems of space and function.

Today, the designer of choice for many in the museum and cultural worlds is the Italian architect Renzo Piano; he has been setting the standard for the contemporary museum ever since his serenely beautiful Menil Museum in Houston in 1987 showed the way to put art and light together. Mr. Piano has mastered the museum's aes-

thetic and public roles at a time when elevated attention and attendance are crucial to its existence and success.

The Morgan is Mr. Piano's first completed museum in New York; the Whitney will follow. His extremely skillful solution for the Morgan is based on the retention and restoration of the three original buildings, all of markedly different times and styles, and their unification through the addition of three new glass and metal-walled connecting structures, with everything held together by a four-story, 50-foot-high clear glass court, or "piazza," as Mr. Piano likes to call it. This central court creates a completely new focus; long before reaching the original library, one encounters a new, defining gallery, a classic 20-by-20-foot cube of the pur-

sign respects current building heights; breaking the construction down into smaller parts, repeating the same modestly scaled building unit throughout and refining the proportions of the additions ensures compatibility. For solidity, Mr. Piano substitutes transparency; for classical clothing, the direct expression of modern glass and steel. His contemporary aesthetic of visible technology coexists comfortably with the historical recall of the older styles. And while I do not buy the clichéd idea that transparency is the new morality, or the hackneyed notion that all this glass and openness suggests an equal openness in art and life, in architecture, at least, exposed steel framing the clearest white glass has a stripped down and subtly articulated beauty that works. It sends its own message while accepting the past. Painting the steel the rosy white of the older, Tennessee pink marble buildings is the only obvious bow to precedent.

The Madison Avenue entry, flanked by the inevitable coatroom and the essential donors' wall, is, perhaps, too cool. After this blankly impersonal start, the full-height glass-walled court is suddenly revealed just beyond, with its views of sky and surrounding buildings, the exhilarating multileveled interior alive with natural

light. This stunning central space provides access and visibility for all parts of the complex; even the links between new and old buildings have views through to the side streets. In a bit of unexpected spatial magic, a glass elevator becomes a visual extension of each floor level as it travels up and down, constantly changing the perception of the interior as it keeps recomposing static space. Majestic permanence is a peripheral value now.

This Morgan is all about architecture; it takes a while to even know where you are. In the past, there was a pleasant ambiguity about the Morgan; you felt that you were being allowed to participate, briefly and for a modest fee, in the personal experience of an intimate, rarified world of arcane research and costly connoisseurship. You really didn't belong there, but you enjoyed the privilege of visiting. Not any more. The Morgan has gone public, with a new mission, in a dazzling new setting. As the director, Charles E. Pierce Jr., has noted with some satisfaction, you can't keep one of the city's cultural crown jewels a secret forever.

Ms. Huxtable is the Journal's architecture critic.

Time Off / Exhibit

Washington
"Noises, Sounds
and Sweet Aires"

This exhibit transports viewers back to Shakespeare's England and the music of the time via a display of ballads, psalms, anthems, teaching manuals, court masques and instruments. Visitors can also enjoy listening to samplings of the music on MP3 players programmed with recordings by the Folger Consort.

• Folger Shakespeare Library, Through Sept. 9, 2002-544-4600 or www.folger.edu.

—Lisa Rossi

Write to the Leisure & Arts page at L&A@wsj.com

...and Its Collections Are Showcased as Never Before

By Eric Gibson

Museum expansions are now so commonplace as to hardly be news. The Morgan's is news, though, because with its just-completed renovation it's an institution not so much enlarged as reborn. Not that it was dead or even moribund prior to 2003 when it closed for construction. Far from it. The difference is that the Morgan's expanded quarters have allowed it to come more fully into its own.

The evolving nomenclature—originally (and still officially) the Pierpont Morgan Library, the name was shortened to the Morgan Library about 20 years ago and tweaked again for the reopening into the Morgan Library and Museum—reflects the difficulty of capturing just what kind of institution the Morgan is. Rather than your typical large, encyclopedic museum like the Met or MoMA, the Morgan is a smaller, more idiosyncratic place. It houses collections built on those of its financier founder: medieval and Renaissance illuminated manuscripts; drawings and works on paper from the Renaissance to the 20th century; literary and musical manuscripts; printed books; ancient Near Eastern seals and statuary.

In the past, you went to the Morgan primarily for its exhibitions. Limited gallery space and the need for a continuous roster of temporary shows (some of which drew on or were built around its rich holdings) meant that it could have an even smaller fraction of its permanent collection on display than most museums do. This gave a rather circumscribed view of the place. You knew you were visiting a treasure house, but with-

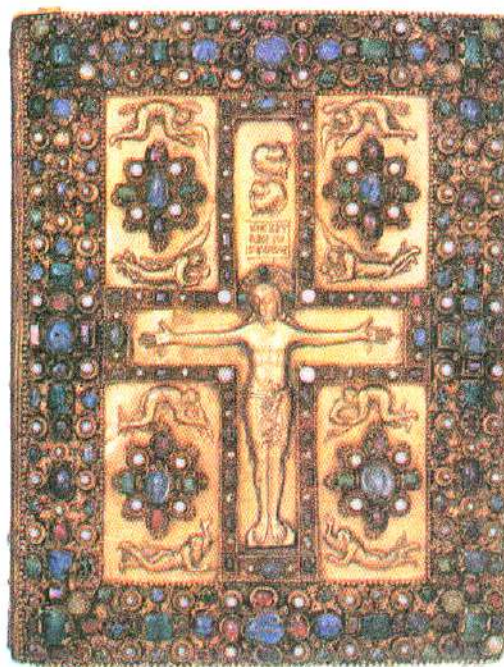
MASTERWORKS FROM THE MORGAN

The Morgan Library and Museum
www.morganlibrary.org

out knowing in detail what kind.

All that has now changed. Supplementing the single large gallery in the 1928 Annex that previously formed the principal exhibition space, the Morgan has opened one of equal size opposite, across the marble hall. It has constructed a 20-foot-by-20-foot, stand-alone cube gallery on the first floor off the new, glass-enclosed court and, on the second floor, built an additional 1,600-square-foot gallery. This has doubled the Morgan's available exhibition space without losing the sense of intimacy that had long been one of its hallmarks. This means that alongside temporary shows it will now be able to put its holdings on long-term view. And so it has now stepped into the spotlight as never before as a collecting institution.

And what a collection. To celebrate the reopening, the museum has mounted "Masterworks From the Morgan," a suite of six exhibitions spread around the various galleries, each devoted to a different aspect of the collection. (They all close



The bejeweled, ninth-century volume of the Lindau Gospels—one of J.P. Morgan's favorite objects.

on different dates between early July and mid-November, so check the Web site.)

In one Annex gallery are superb drawings by Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Cézanne, to name a few. Across the way are sumptuous illuminated manuscripts and bound books. In the hall between is a display of Mesopotamian cylinder seals, one-inch-tall stones cut with scenes that are marvels of miniature carving. (And congratulations to the person who thought of including the copper figurine from the 21st century B.C. Talk about taking the long view.) On the second floor, visitors can view manuscripts (with their often-violent crossings out and emendations) by the likes of Edgar Allan Poe and Ernest Hemingway, and a variety of musical manuscripts, some of which have headphones next to them allowing you to listen to a recording of the work in question.

Walking in and around these galleries, you're reminded that in terms of the quality of its objects, the Morgan is in the first rank of the nation's museums. Something else that strikes you are the affinities between these very different kinds of things that give this eclectic collection a loose and thought-provoking cohesion. Both drawings and literary manuscripts, for example, show their authors in the full flood of creation. Illuminated manuscripts are both paintings and books. Cylinder seals straddle the worlds of sculpture and printing. And so on.

One other important feature of the new Morgan is the way it has liberated the persona of its founder, J.P. Morgan.

It's common in arts circles to hear people say that we need to be "more like Europe," where the arts are heavily subsidized by the government. Why? The

remarkable fact is that almost all of our arts institutions were founded, and have been sustained, by private philanthropy. In the cultural arena alone, more private wealth has been transferred to public ownership in this country over the past century and a half than at any other time or place in history. And it has been done voluntarily, unlike Europe, where conquest and expropriation were sometimes a feature of collection building.

Yet we know less than we should about these people—why they collected what they did and how their taste was formed. Fortunately, that's changing. In recent years Washington's Phillips Collection has done an excellent job of explaining what made founder Duncan Phillips tick aesthetically, with the result that we now have a much deeper appreciation of the extraordinary intellectual journey taken by the man who famously denounced the work of Picasso and others in the 1913 Armory Show as "stupefying in its vulgarity," yet who, a mere eight years later, founded the nation's first museum of modern art.

It appears the Morgan, too, might be moving in this direction. As part of the renovation, it has removed the velvet rope that long barred entry into J.P. Morgan's study in the original 1902 McKim building, allowing visitors for the first time to bask in the hothouse decor of this period room while admiring its paintings, sculptures and decorative objects close up. Also, the cube gallery on the first floor has been designated a "Medieval Treasury," the place to see his favorite objects, such as the bejeweled, ninth-century volume of the Lindau Gospels, the robes of whose mourning angels on the cover billow as if in a breeze. Morgan himself is thus more of a presence in his own institution than ever before. It would be nice to think these two steps augur larger ones, such as a program of exhibitions and publications that will eventually give us as complete a picture of Morgan the collector as we now have of Morgan the financier.

One challenge is going to be how to give visitors what the French call a "sens de visite"—a sense of easy navigability through the museum. While the glass court of the new Morgan—surely, now, the most welcoming public interior in Manhattan—is the organizing center, a place for visitors to collect themselves after arriving or to refresh themselves after touring the exhibits, it's easy to become disoriented when you exit one part of Renzo Piano's "campus" and want to move to another.

For now, though, given all the wonderful things to look at, maybe getting lost in the new Morgan isn't such a hardship after all.

Mr. Gibson is the Journal's Leisure & Arts features editor.

Pepper . . . and Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"The hero of the game was a heroine."

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Bookshelf / By William Tucker

How to Make the Rhetoric Less Heated, and the Planet Too

The global-warming debate itself is generating a worrisome degree of heat. There is Al Gore especially, posing with movie stars on the cover of Vanity Fair's "environmen-

ing is happening. He believes the evidence to be compelling, however uncertain certain variables may yet be. But it is mere



new hybrid technology may eventually reduce our oil consumption. But coal is the place to start. Much of Mr. Sweet's

the melting threats to it—was published in 1968, long before our current overheated political debate.

So what to do? Mr. Sweet lays down his first principle in chapter one: