

The New York Landmarks Conservancy  
Lucy G. Moses Preservation Awards  
Submittal



Clemente Soto Velez Cultural & Educational Center  
107 Suffolk Street  
New York, New York

Exterior Renovation

**SUPERSTRUCTURES**  
+ **ENGINEERS**  
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*From the NY Public Library Digital Collection (Suffolk & Rivington, 1920)*

## **Rehabilitating a Community Resource**

The Clemente Soto Vélaz Cultural & Educational Center is the foremost architectural landmark in that part of the Lower East Side still known as Loisaida. The Dutch Neo-Gothic building was designed as a public school by Charles “C.B.J.” Snyder. He is widely recognized for his transformation of school building design and quality during his tenure as Superintendent of School Buildings of the New York City Board of Education between 1891 and 1923.

Snyder perceived school buildings as civic monuments that would better society and sought to provide spaces for learning that would offer a respite from noisy streets and poverty. He was an inventive designer who at his best created school buildings that were appropriately imposing in their neighborhood settings, and that also, in both their massing and their ornamentation, showed a light-handedness that kept the structures from feeling oppressive.

He was concerned with health and safety issues in public schools and focused on fire protection, ventilation, lighting, and classroom size. Snyder used terra cotta blocks in floor construction to improve fireproofing, and large and numerous windows to allow more light and air into the classrooms.

The subject building, located on a corner lot, is L-shaped in configuration and five stories in height. A dramatic steeply pitched roof line punctuated by dormers defines the street facades.

The building has a rich variety of ornamental details in terra cotta, limestone and brick. At the time the project commenced, many of the original wood windows remained while others had been replaced with less ornate wood or aluminum frames. An iron fence surrounds the facility at the street facades and there are five entrance vestibules with wrought iron gates, bluestone steps and mosaic tile floors.

The building served as P.S.160 until the mid-seventies. In 1984 it became the home of Solidaridad Humana, a community-based bilingual education program.

In 1993, Edgardo Vega Yunque, Nelson Landrieu and Mateo Gómez, all of whom are actively involved in the Latino arts community of New York City, founded CSV. At the time, Teatro La Tea, established by Landrieu and Gómez, was already based at 107 Suffolk Street. Less than a year later, the trio acquired the lease to the building from Solidaridad Humana.

CSV is a Puerto Rican/Latino cultural institution that has demonstrated a broad-minded cultural vision and a collaborative philosophy. Clemente Soto Vélez, a poet, journalist and activist, mentored many generations of Latino artists in Puerto Rico and in New York City. The organization's mission is to foster, promote, and support the development of the arts within the community and to increase appreciation of Puerto Rican-Latino arts in the city and beyond.

CSV currently provides studio space for over two dozen artists, as well as a home for the following institutions:

- Hispanic Organization for Latin Actors (HOLA), committed to exploring and expanding available avenues for projecting Hispanic artists into the mainstream
- Afro Brazil Arts / Capoeira Angola Quintal, whose mission is to inspire achievement through capoeira, a Brazilian martial art that incorporates music and dancing
- Fantastic Experimental Latino Theater (FELT), offering interactive theater and educational programs
- Mark DeGarmo & Dancers/Dynamic Forms Inc, providing a comprehensive arts experience to students from economically disadvantaged circumstances
- The Society of the Educational Arts, Inc. (SEA), a bilingual arts-in-education organization & Latino theatre company for young audiences
- Teatro LaTea, one of New York's premier Off-Off Broadway Latino theaters





*107 Suffolk Street prior to restoration*

After over a century of service without substantial rehabilitation, the building was in very poor condition when SUPERSTRUCTURES began an investigation of the exterior in 2006. By that point there had been a sidewalk shed in place for eight years due to the deteriorated condition of the façade. Interviews done as part of a master planning study conducted by CSV during this period confirmed a deep respect and admiration for the architecture of the building's exterior. However, there was a vital interest in improving the safety of the building and in providing a more welcoming entrance.

The complete exterior restoration completed in 2012 included roof replacement and repair, replacement of bulkheads and copper gutters, replacement and/or repair of brick masonry, restoration or replacement of terra cotta, replacement and/or restoration of windows, cleaning of limestone and terrazzo. The Department of NYC Cultural Affairs and NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services funded the project, which was managed by the NYC Department of Design and Construction. Text accompanying the photos on subsequent pages details some of the highlights of the renovation project.

As with many arts centers and organizations throughout the country, CSV has struggled to keep its doors open. The City-funded exterior restoration and a planned forthcoming interior restoration will greatly enhance CSV's ability to fulfill its mission as a Puerto Rican, Latino, multicultural cultural and education center and provide an attractive hub for cultural heritage activities within New York City and beyond.

*Sources: Clemente Solo Vélez Cultural Center website; SUPERSTRUCTURES Schematic Design Report.*

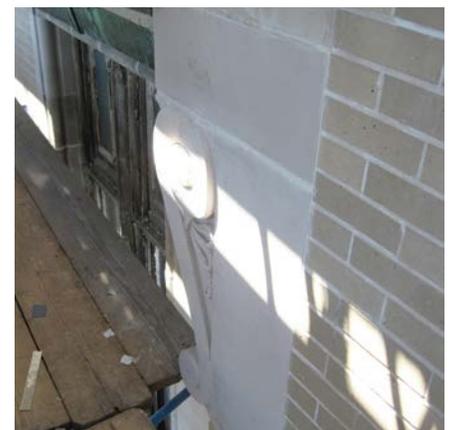
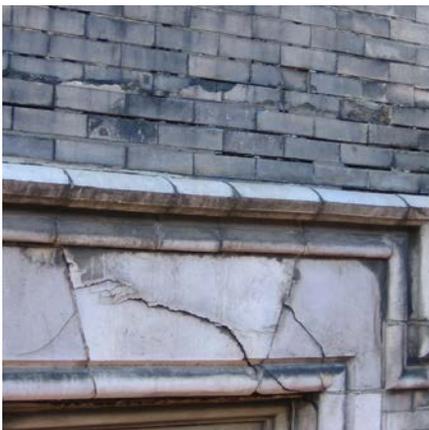


## Terra Cotta

The terra cotta at the window heads and spandrels was severely deteriorated with cracks and spalls observed due to water penetration and expansion of corroding steel and could not be saved. On occasion terra cotta was found to be bulging from the wall. Replacement terra cotta was provided to match the original.

Original terra cotta gables, window surrounds, and copings that were in fair condition were carefully cleaned and repaired. Mortar joints were repointed throughout.

*Top, left; bottom, left: Terra cotta before.  
Bottom, center: Spalling and displaced terra  
cotta bracket. Bottom, left: Terra cotta  
bracket after. Top, right: Terra cotta after.*



*Top, left; bottom, left; bottom, center: Deteriorated terra cotta. Bottom, left: New terra cotta installed. Top, right: New terra cotta after.*



## Brick Masonry

Brick masonry was replaced on all five floors of the street facades. The replacement of iron-spot brick involved an extensive match process – approximately 20 samples were reviewed.

The outer wythe of brick was laid on a running course, i.e. there was no brick perpendicular to tie the courses together and back-up masonry was placed at an angle to tie the courses together. With the deterioration of the steel frame, particularly at the spandrels, exterior brick was pushed away from the plane of the wall. To stabilize the masonry, the angled bricks were replaced with stainless steel veneer anchors at every five courses.

*Top, left: Brick deterioration before restoration. Top, right: Brick after restoration. Bottom, left: angled brick used before to tie courses together. Bottom center: Brick displacement at spandrel level. Bottom right: matching new brick to original.*





Stone

The sidewalk shed having been in place for many years encouraged vandalism of the limestone, bluestone steps, and windows. Limestone at the base of the building and extending up to the second floor at the center bay was cleaned, which due to the level of grime, graffiti, and biological growth was an arduous process requiring several different cleaning methods. Once cleaned, the limestone and granite base of the building was in fair condition.

Some areas required restoration or replacement of limestone in kind. One bluestone tread of the entrance steps was replaced. The limestone and granite base, as well as the bluestone entrance steps were repointed.

Top, left: Graffiti covered limestone. Top, right: Limestone cleaned. Bottom, left: Ornamental limestone before. Bottom, center: Ornamental limestone after. Bottom, right: Limestone cleaning in progress.

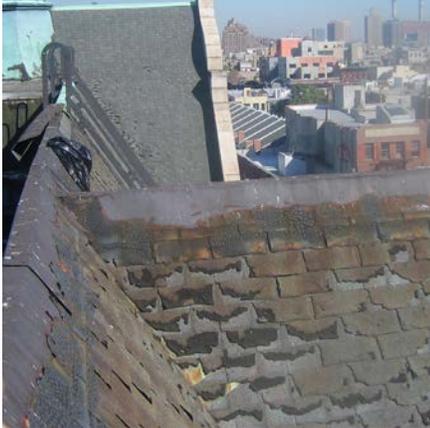


## Roofs and Bulkheads

The existing pitched roofs were in very poor condition. The existing asphalt shingles were disintegrating, clogging the drains of the built-in copper gutters below. In many locations water was able to penetrate the interior causing damage to interior finishes and artist's studios.

The asphalt shingles were replaced with imitation slate tiles made from recycled rubber and plastic. Copper flashings, ridge caps, and built-in gutters were replaced with new copper including the standing seam cladding at the dormer walls. The flat roof behind the sloped roofs was also replaced as were the bulkhead roofs and cladding and a skylight.

*Top, left: Slate roof before. Top, right: Slate roof after. Bottom, left: Flat roof before. Bottom, center: Flat roof after. Bottom right: Roofing installation in progress.*

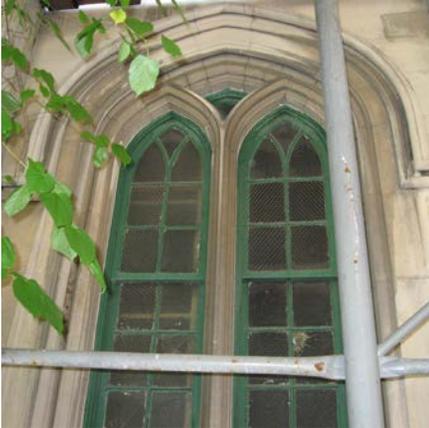




## Windows

The first-floor wood windows were restored and fitted with new hardware to match the originals. Many of the windows had been vandalized and had to be fitted with new glazing. The windows were painted with color determined to be original based on paint analysis. The wood windows on the upper floors were found to be in advanced state of deterioration and were replaced with aluminum windows. The original wood windows had very detailed profiles which were replicated as closely as possible in aluminum. This was achieved by using custom extrusions of profile and width that closely replicate the original detailing, including the pointed arches of the fixed transoms above the double-hung windows.

*Top, left: Wood windows before . Top, right: Wood window after. Bottom, left: Window before. Bottom, center: Window after. Bottom, right: New wood window from interior.*





## Rear Elevation

At the back of the building the brick masonry was restored including replacement of deteriorated brick, lintel repair and flashing, rebuilding of the parapets, and repointing. The windows were replaced with aluminum to replicate the original configuration of the wood windows.

Top, left: Brick matching. Top, right: Rear facade after. Bottom, left: Rear facade before. Bottom, right: Brick replacement.



## **Credits**

New York City's Department of Design and Construction, which managed the restoration project, wishes to acknowledge the following individuals:

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- DCAS (Department of Citywide Administrative Services) Chief Asset Management Officer/Deputy Commissioner: Joey Kara Koch

### New York City Department of Design and Construction

- DDC Commissioner: David J. Burney, FAIA
- DDC Deputy Commissioner-Public Buildings: David Resnick, AIA
- DDC Assistant Commissioner: Michael Nastasi
- DDC Program Director-Cultural Institutions: Konstantinos Kritharis
- DDC Deputy Program Director-Cultural Institutions: Jeremy Lockard
- DDC Construction Project Manager: Medhat Azer
- DDC Design Project Manager: Joseph Piwowarski

### Tenant:

Clemente Soto Véllez Cultural & Educational Center: Jan Hanvik, Executive Director

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