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## Driehaus Museum unveils \$8 million renovation of ornate Murphy Auditorium

By Dennis Rodkin



Credit: Dennis Rodkin

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The Murphy Auditorium on Erie Street, built in 1926 as an opulent copy of a church in Paris, reopened today after an \$8 million renovation by the Richard H. Driehaus Museum, the next-door neighbor that purchased it in 2022.

With an exterior of tall stone pillars and carved bronze doors beneath a Greek temple's roof and an interior whose walls and domed ceiling are richly ornamented with plaster and stained glass, the John B. Murphy Auditorium exemplifies the late philanthropist Richard Driehaus's fondness for architecture, said Zachary Lazar, president of the museum's board.

"Good architecture brings pleasure," Lazar said, directly quoting years-ago speech by [Driehaus](#), the investment manager and architecture preservationist who died shortly before his namesake museum bought the Murphy. "It makes people feel comfortable in their greater home, this great city, Chicago."



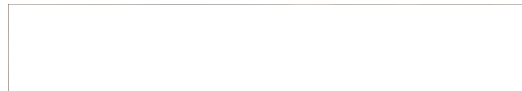
Credit: Dennis Rodkin

The addition of the Murphy Auditorium doubles the size of the Driehaus Museum, said Lisa Key, the museum's executive director. The museum, which focuses on the decorative arts of the 19th century, opened in 2008 in the former [Nickerson Mansion](#), built in 1884. Key said the Murphy adds space for events and a film series, in its grand auditorium, and added studio and program space on the floors above it.



The cost of the year-long renovation of the Murphy by the architecture firm Antunovich and Associates and the construction firm Bulley & Andrews was \$8 million, Key said.

When the museum [announced it was buying the Murphy building](#) three years ago, neither party disclosed a price. The sale closed in early 2022, but Cook County public records do not show a price. Key declined to provide a figure.





Credit: Dennis Rodkin

Among the rich details preserved in the auditorium are a row of throne-like carved wood chairs where eminent surgeons and officers of the American College of Surgeons would have sat in positions of honor when the ACS operated the auditorium. There's also a stained glass panel that in the rear wall above the stage, plaster garlands and medallions by the score, and a pair of bronze front doors by Tiffany.

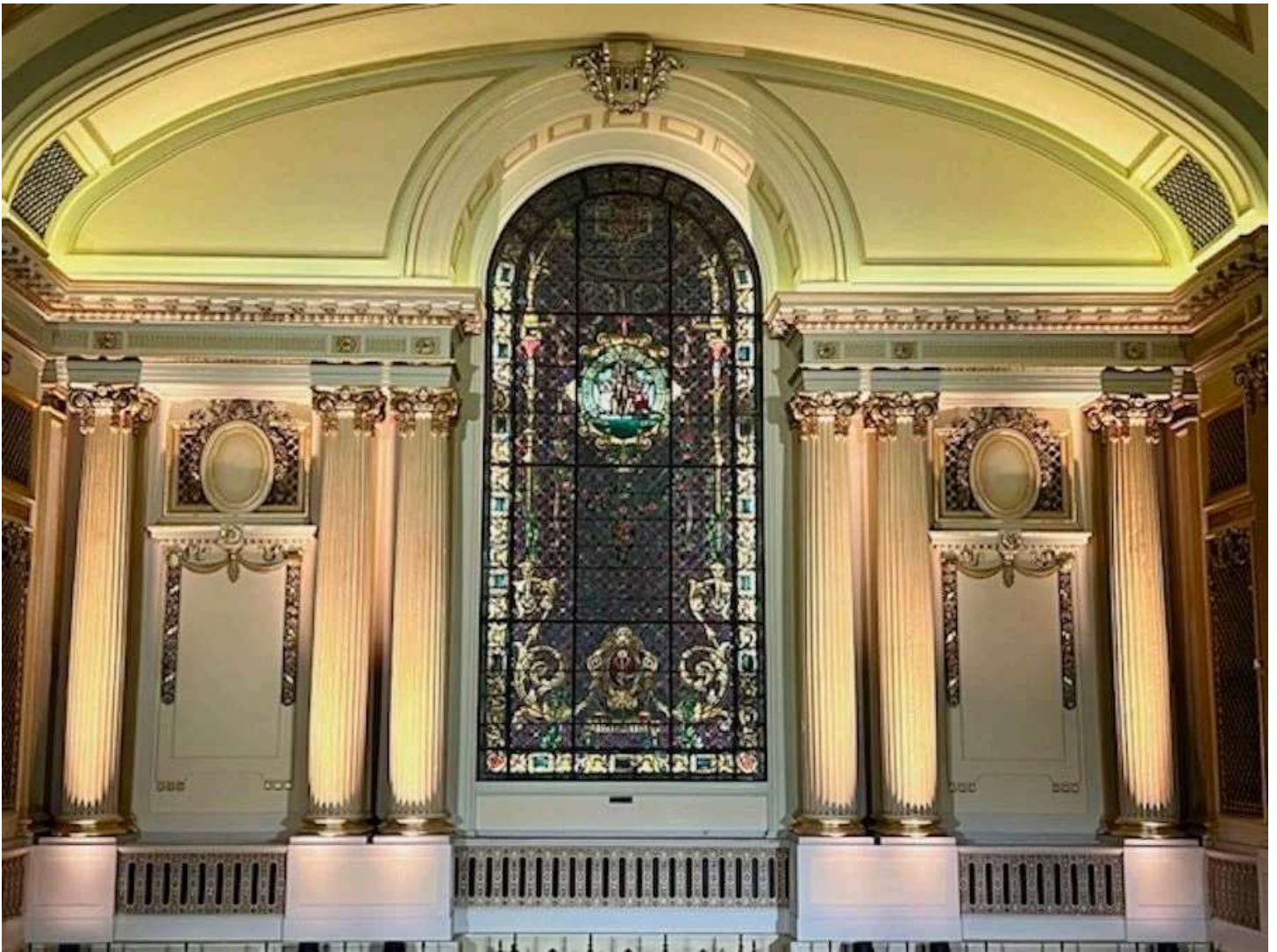
The building was designed Benjamin Marshall and Charles Fox, who copied the exterior of the [Chapelle Notre-Dame-de-Consolation](#) in Paris.

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The monumental [Murphy Auditorium building](#) is named for John B. Murphy, a pioneering Chicago physician of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Murphy's primary work was in abdominal surgery, relatively new at the time, and along with developing materials and techniques that became widely

used, he operated on Teddy Roosevelt in 1912 after [the former president was shot](#) on his way to make a speech in Milwaukee.



Credit: Dennis Rodkin

Murphy died in 1916 and his widow, Jeanette Plamondon Murphy, led the effort to get a memorial to him built. A decade later, the building opened as a teaching and assembly center of the American College of Surgeons.

The ACS was headquartered next door in the former Nickerson mansion. The two remained in the surgeons' group's hands even after the group moved to a Streeterville high rise in 1989.

In 2003, Driehaus restored both buildings in a deal that ended with him taking ownership of the Nickerson mansion. Then in 2019, the surgeons group put the Murphy building on the market, resulting in the sale to the Driehaus organization in 2022.

The two buildings and a third, the stately stone [Ransom Cable mansion](#) kitty-corner from them at Wabash and Erie, where Driehaus Capital Management is housed, make up a campus of finely restored historical remnants that speak of the late benefactor's stewardship of Chicago's historical architecture, Lazar said.