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MAGAZINE

How Annabelle Selldorf Is Updating The Frick Collection

The AD100 architect is honoring the museum's past while meeting the moment

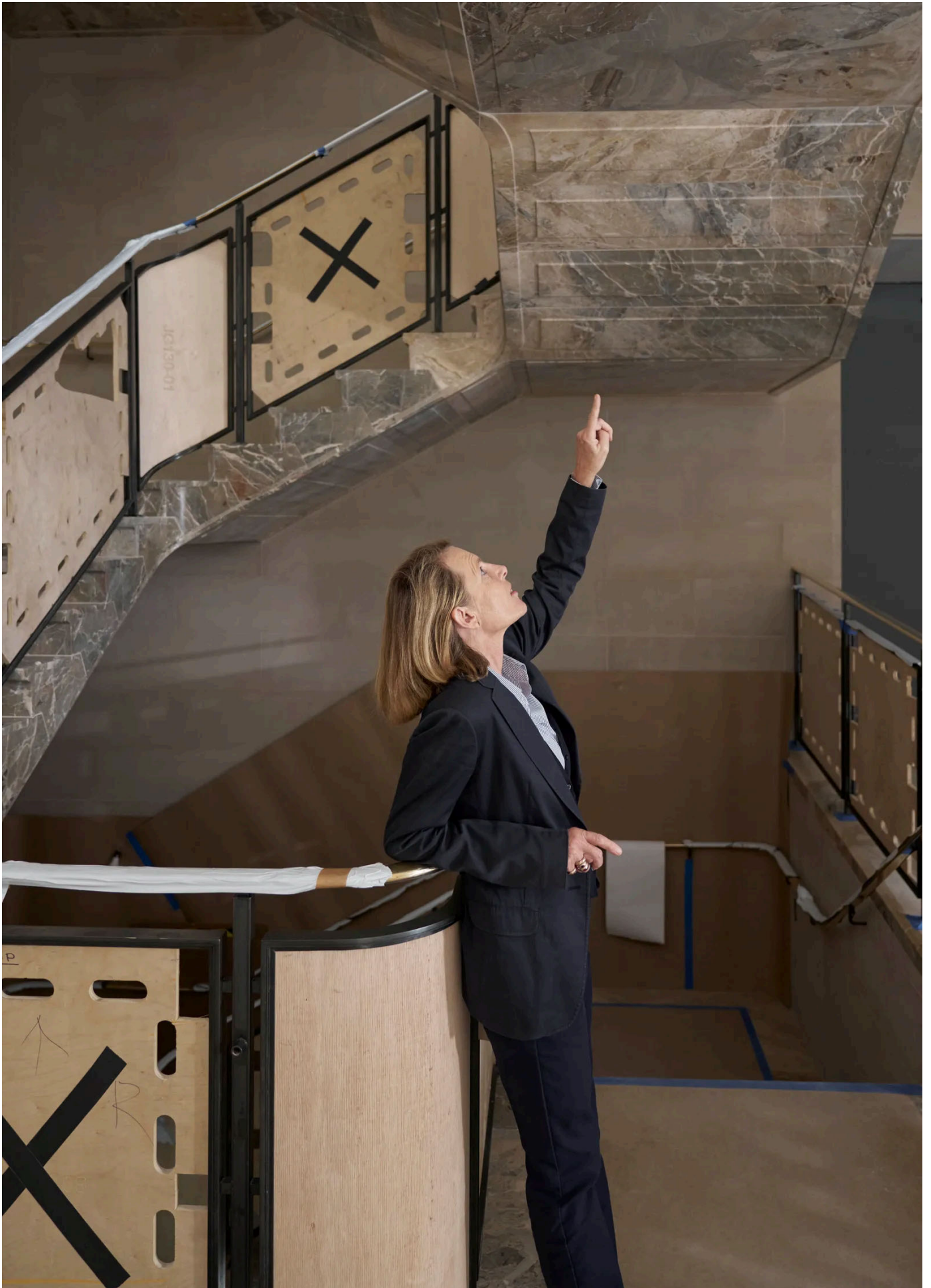
By Sam Cochran, Photography by Martien Mulder

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Indiana limestone is prized for its refinement and durability—a fitting choice, then as today, for The Frick Collection in New York City. Thomas Hastings used it when first building the 1914 Beaux Arts home of industrialist Henry Clay Frick. So too did the architect John Russell Pope in the early 1930s, when he reimagined the mansion as a museum and designed its neighboring library. And now AD100 Hall of Famer Annabelle Selldorf has followed in their footsteps for the mansion’s first comprehensive update in nearly 90 years, opening to the public in April 2025.

“The proportions are classical but the detailing is clear and modernist,” says Selldorf of the stone, which she used on walls and façades in the same block pattern as the historic edifices. “It’s in the nature of materials to appear in different ways for different eras.” Shrewdly stitching together past and present, her blockbuster project—completed in collaboration with executive architects Beyer Blinder Belle—includes 60,000 square feet of repurposed space and 27,000 of new construction, much of it along the rear of the library and within a two-story addition. A 220-seat auditorium, meanwhile, has been added beneath the museum’s beloved 1977 Russell Page garden, currently under restoration. (The subterranean space—originally the basements of three neighboring town houses—had previously served as storage.) But the heart of the project is the reception hall, a metamorphic marvel with a statement staircase of Breccia Aurora Blue marble.

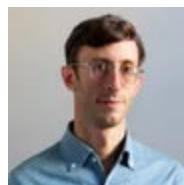


Selldorf admiring the painterly stone of her staircase above.

“It’s an impactful visual moment,” Selldorf notes, “but it’s also very impactful in its function.” Lowering the ceiling of that historic room and raising the roof to create an additional story, her design will usher art lovers to new or improved amenities like the shop, café, education center, and special exhibition galleries, all shoehorned within the complex set of constraints. Upstairs and down, the reception hall also connects to the mansion, whose second floor has been transformed from offices into galleries for portraits, early Renaissance paintings, and more. “You can do as you always do, retracing your old steps,” says Selldorf. “You also get multiple new pathways.”

Museum commissions loom large in the minds of contemporary starchitects as coveted chances to flex some creative muscle. But Selldorf’s interventions, far from any acrobatics of ego, are ambitious exercises in restraint, deferring both to visitor experience and the integrity of the mansion. “It’s pretty marvelous to see everything again,” she says of favorite paintings, now reinstalled. “It makes you happy to rediscover.”

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[Sam Cochran](#) currently serves as the brand's Global Features Director. In that role he shepherds coverage of design, culture, travel, and architecture news for the print magazine while contributing to all of AD's international platforms, editorial initiatives, and events. As an expert in sustainability, renovation, and contemporary design topics, he... [Read more](#)

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