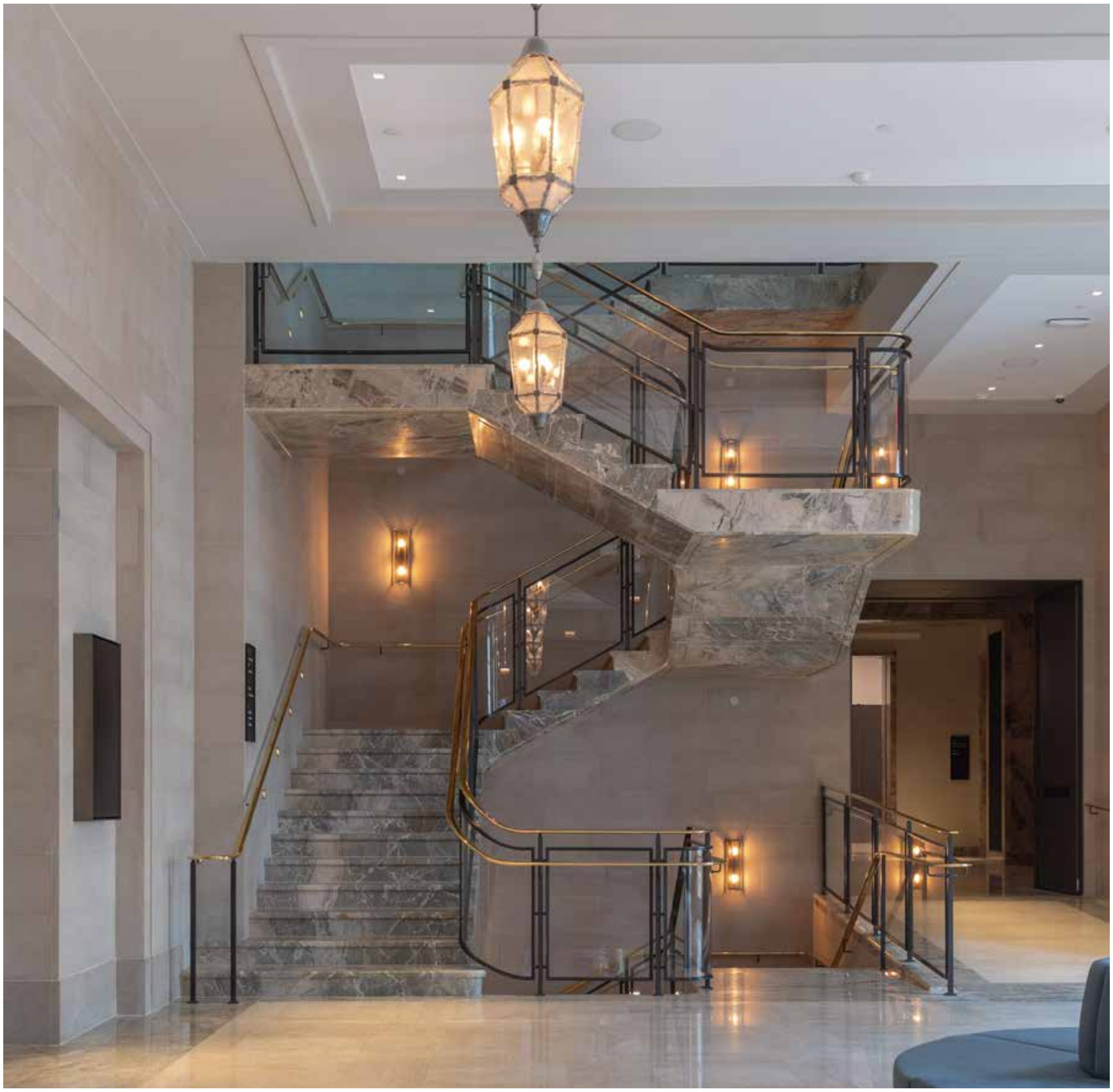
NOOK



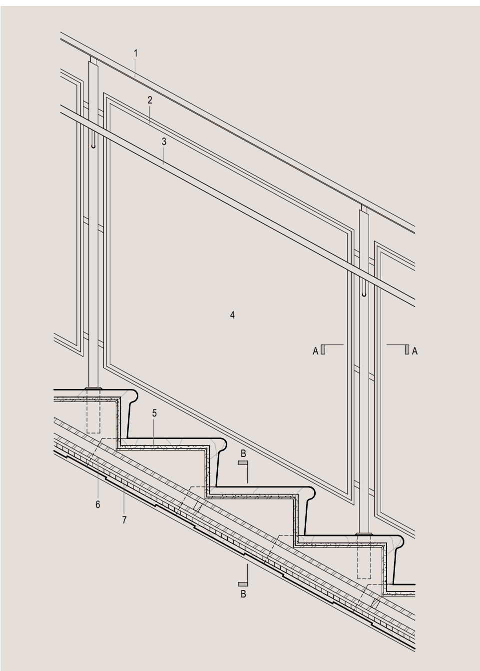
EXACTING DETAIL

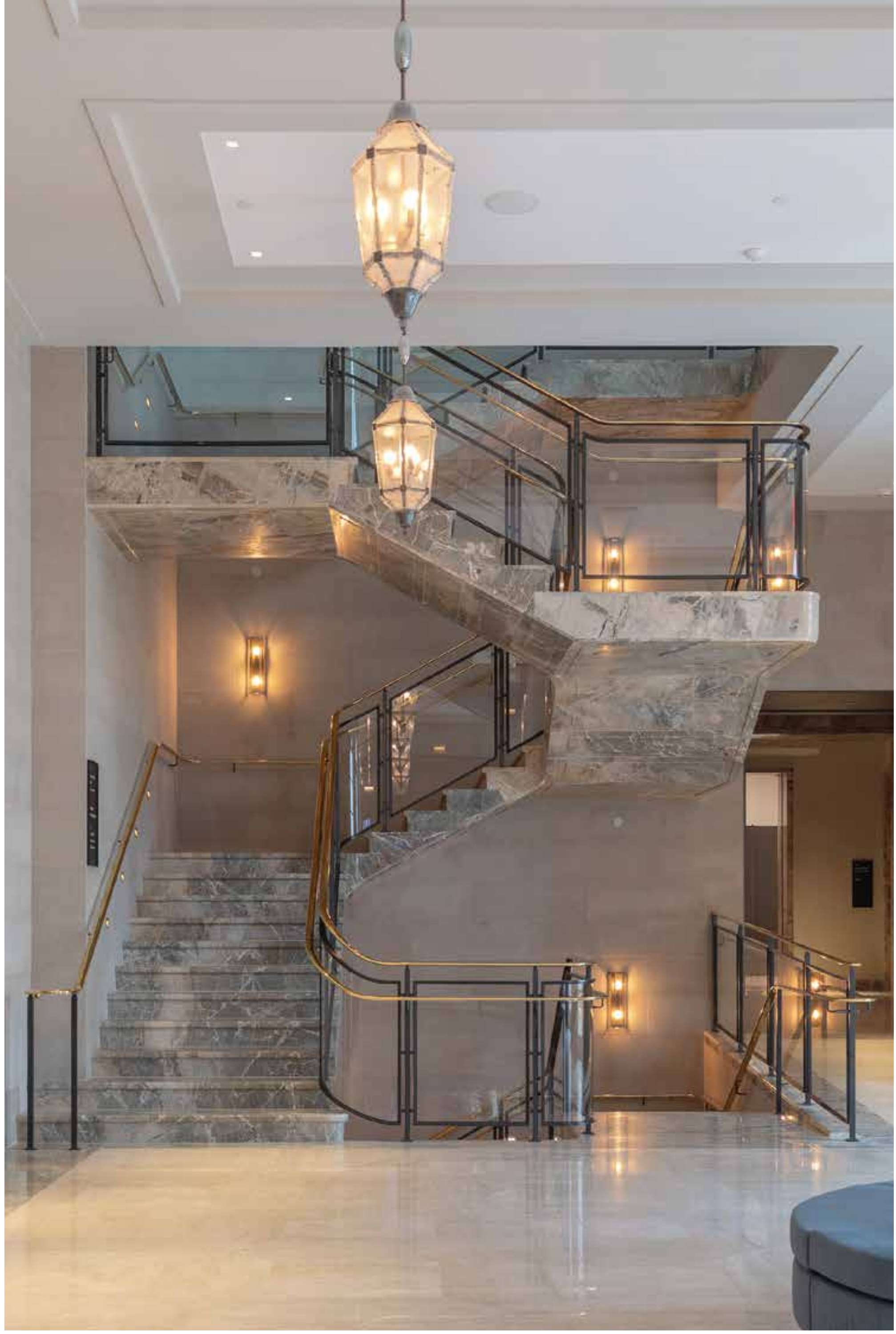
Last April, the Frick Collection reopened its doors after a five-year expansion and renovation project aimed at enhancing the visitor experience – a transformation led by Selldorf Architects. With principal ANNABELLE SELLDORF and partner-in-charge OLIVER LINK, Nook zooms in on three intricate architectural details of the renewed museum.

Interview by Thierry Somers

▼ Stair M Railing Elevation detail
Scale: 1 1/2” = 1’-0”

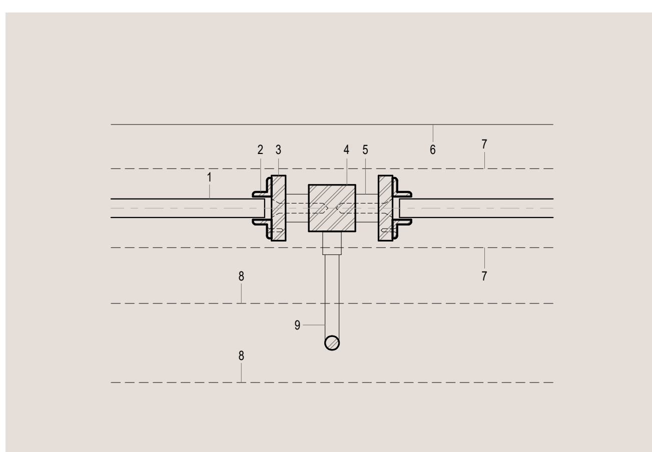
1. Brass cap rail
2. Blackened steel railing
3. Brass handrail
4. Glass panel
5. Marble thread and riser seating bed stair pan
6. Steel structure
7. Marble soffit glued to honeycomb





▶ Detail A-A: Baluster plan detail
Scale: 6” = 1’-0”

1. Glass panel
2. Blackened steel L-bar
3. Blackened steel flat bar
4. Blackened steel railing post
5. Blackened steel spacer
6. Edge of stair thread
7. Blackened cap rail above
8. Blackened handrail above
9. Blackened steel handrail bracket



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ANNABELLE SELLDORF Making interventions in a major New York museum carries immense responsibility. As an architect, I'm conservative in that I prefer to preserve and not change something that already works. As we delve into this project, you begin to see the big picture, and with that clarity, every gesture becomes more serious, always focused on thoughtful improvement. Taking it step by step helps avoid becoming overwhelmed.

OLIVER LINK The staircase detail speaks volumes about the materiality of the project. We spent a significant amount of time cataloguing the various Italian marbles used in the original 1914 Frick mansion and the 1935 expansion. To our surprise and delight, we discovered that some of these stones were still available from quarries in Italy.

For the new construction, we wanted a minimal palette of two stones per room to keep the spaces serene. All stone was cut in Italy, where each room was laid out full-scale in warehouses for review. I approved the placement piece by piece, swapping as needed like a puzzle. Once finalized, the stones were packaged, shipped to New York, and installed immediately, with cutting on site required only at the borders.

For the staircase, we selected Breccia Aurora Blue to highlight the marble's vivid character and expressive qualities. Since it was used in the historic mansion, this stone provided a sense of continuity with the new construction, while we reimagined it in a more modern, contemporary way.

We wanted to push modern engineering to its limits and make the staircase as thin and refined as possible. Our inspiration came from cascading stone staircases often seen in Italy, where each tread appears to flow seamlessly into the next, forming one continuous, elegant curve. We aimed to achieve that same sense of slimness and fluidity.

However, this staircase also had to function as part of the building's evacuation plan. It had to serve as an emergency exit route from the auditorium below, which meant it couldn't be constructed from stone alone – a steel structure was required to meet safety, accessibility, and functionality standards.

We worked closely with the engineers to create a steel sub-structure that's very thin and very strong. Two plates form a thin metal ladder just four centimetres thick, running the full height of the staircase. Fixed to two walls, the steps appear to float. Its ribbon-like shape gives it the strength to support the weight across all floors.

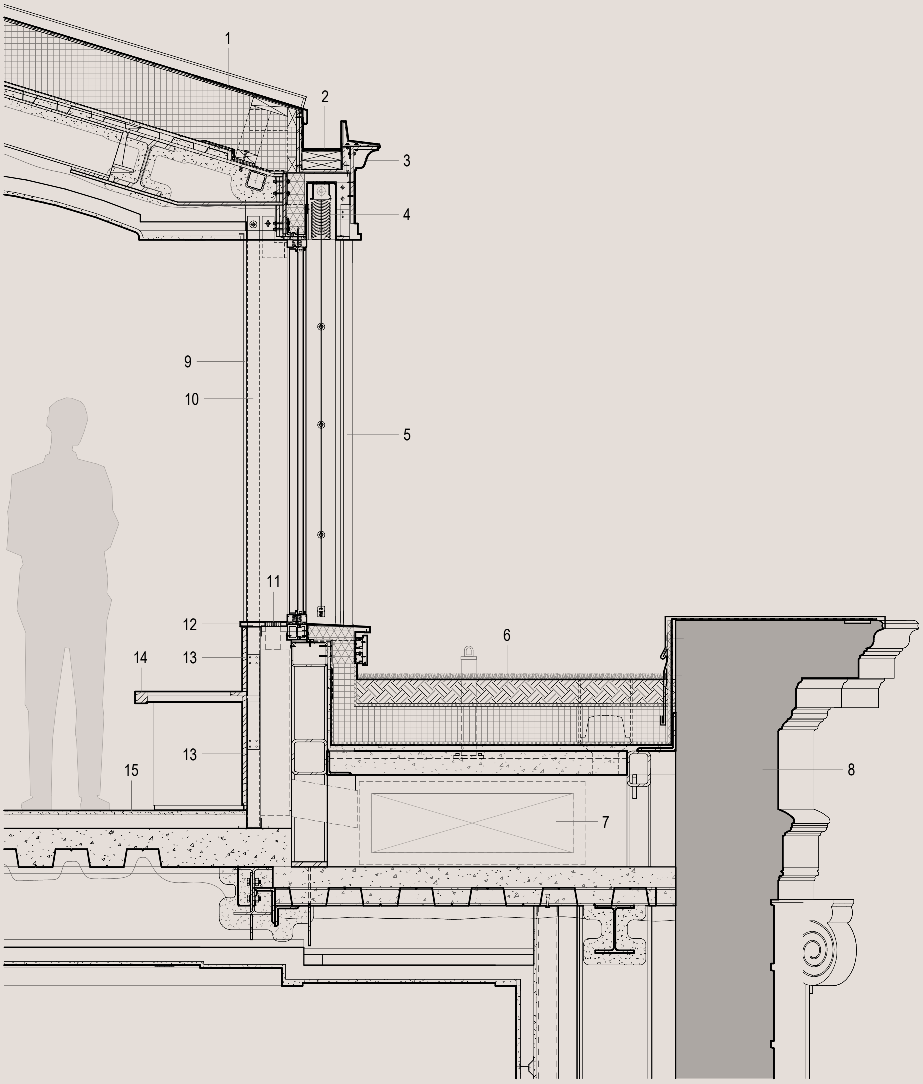
Coordinating the steel and stone was crucial, because the tolerances were very tight, as precise as an eighth of 2.5 centimetres. Since the steel was structural rather than ornamental, it didn't always have the refined finish one might prefer. Precision was especially critical: if the stone didn't fit perfectly, it could crack or have to be remade.

For the handrail, we looked at the mansion's original 1914 marble staircase with its ornate iron railing, but chose a simpler steel design, fabricated in Toronto. The steel was first wire-brushed to create a perfectly smooth surface, then blackened, and finally finished with a light, matte sealant to enhance its natural character. It wasn't painted or lacquered, so over time the brass handrail will naturally develop a patina from use. The guardrail features clear laminated glass framed by square posts and thin steel supports, with some panels curved to follow the staircase's sweep. After installing the steel, plywood templates were sent to New Zealand, where the 1.3-centimetre-thick glass was precisely cut and fabricated.

ANNABELLE SELLDORF Designing the staircase was far from straightforward. We knew exactly where it needed to be in the reception hall to pass cleanly through the building and land precisely on each floor. We considered multiple configurations – round, oval, even switchback – and did many iterations of the steel handrail designs. Oliver and *Paul Granger* [senior project architect at Selldorf, Nook] carefully honed every dimension and detail.

I'm still in awe and proud of how the team navigated the process. In the end, the staircase surprised me. Although I'd seen the stone slabs for the landings many times, once installed and framed, the array of patterns and veining looked like pictures of landscapes – a striking and beautiful effect we couldn't have foreseen.

◀ Detail drawings of the staircase at the Frick Collection by Selldorf Architects. Photos: Nicholas Venezia



▶ **Upper lobby above reception hall**
scale 3/4” = 1’.0”

1. Steep slope copper roof
2. Low slope copper gutter
3. Bronze cornish
4. Motorised exterior metal shades
5. Bronze window wall
6. Vegetative roof
7. Supply ductwork
8. Existing exterior limestone wall
9. Bronze storefront mullion
10. Steel deflection post within mullion
11. Bronze linear bar grill
12. Bronze window sill
13. Wood panelling
14. Wood built-in bench
15. Herringbone marble floor

Read the full article here.