





The Frick reopened in April last year following a five-year renovation [Selldorf Architects was appointed to lead the project in 2016]. Along the way, we faced a lot of public process, a Covid interruption, plus a huge team of art and excavation experts... design is but part of it.

I came on board because a first plan had been rejected: it proposed building over the garden Russell Page had designed in the 1970s. Ian Wardropper, the museum's director, wisely collected his board and looked for a new architect. I don't like scandals but I felt this was within my abilities, having worked on the Neue Galerie and [The National Gallery](#) and having designed exhibitions at Gagosian, Pace Gallery and [the Whitney](#).

As part of the renovation, we aimed to open up the reception and the second floor, provide temporary exhibition space and create the auditorium below the garden. We also connected the museum and library, and added both a conservatory-type space and a café called Westmoreland.



Selldorf in the Living Hall, with (from left) *Portrait of a Man in a Red Hat*, c1520, by Titian, *St Francis in the Desert*, c1475-80, by Giovanni Bellini, and *Pietro Aretino*, c1537, by Titian © Marissa Alper





Portrait of a Man in a Red Hat, c1520, by Titian © Marissa Alper







People love the Frick, so they were terrified of change. I get that. I came to the Frick the day after I first arrived in New York from Cologne in 1979. I was on my gap year, before heading to the Pratt Institute, New York, to study architecture. It has an unforgettable atmosphere. We all kind of think the Frick is ours.

Thomas Hastings designed it between 1913 and 1914 as a residence for the Gilded Age industrialist Henry Clay Frick, and although it was a family home it was always intended to be left as a museum. In the 1930s, American architect John Russell Pope converted it and built the Frick Art Research Library next door; a reception hall was added in the 1970s.







The key to architecture is to understand how people move – here, there's no set route but we added another staircase made of breccia aurora marble so visitors can finish their visit in a loop. When you look up at it, it's as expressive as a Tiepolo painted ceiling.

Architecture is also about celebrating the dignity of an old building while giving it new purpose and energy. The wall sconces and lanterns we've added in the Reception Hall were custom-designed by us, and made of Murano glass and bronze; they reference Pope's original lanterns. Such details are 21st century, but they coexist elegantly with what was there before. There is a new entrance to the Garden Court, clad in marble used by Pope in 1935 – a neoclassical indoor atrium with a marble fountain and pool, and palms and plants placed around stone benches.



*With one of the Two Figures of Ladies on Stands, from the Qing Dynasty Kangxi period, c1662-1722 © Marissa Alper*











The auditorium, used for concerts and talks, is my pride and joy. It's shaped like the inside of a clam shell. That idea was mine, but you never quite come up with anything new. There's a kind of austerity in the building already; it has a restrained classicism. The auditorium has been painted the colour of nothing, like a cloudy day.

My favourite pictures here are male portraits, which seems ridiculous, given all the pictures I could reference in 2026. Bellini's *St Francis in the Desert*, in the Living Hall, has such depth and detail; the spirit of St Francis is so intense. I also love El Greco's *St Jerome* and Holbein's *Portrait of Sir Thomas More* here, as well as the Agnolo Bronzino of *Lodovico Capponi* in the South Hall. The latter has a lazy eye – you wonder, is he looking at you? It's his age [Capponi was around 17 when he sat for the portrait]: he looks so profoundly confused. At once a man, gorgeous and proud, and yet a boy.



The public entrance to The Frick Collection © Marissa Alper

In the West Gallery, which is the main gallery, the [Rembrandt](#) self-portrait is so engaging. That virtuoso brushwork, that invitingly direct gaze. Van Dyck's *Frans Snyder*s is another favourite. I have a case of transference – in my head it has become a picture of Van Dyck himself, although I know it isn't. The glass in the skylight in the gallery had become discoloured before the renovation, and the replacement lends a warmer atmosphere. The conservator, knowing how harmful daylight is to paintings, would have liked to tar over it; we felt the room needed daylight to preserve its integrity.











The curatorial team had the wall fabrics in the West Gallery, and elsewhere, reproduced by Prella, the Lyon silk house, who had kept the original swatches from 1914. The velvet walls are green as the light shines on them — and on the other side of the room they're nearly black. Paint doesn't give this depth. The Oval Room just off the West Gallery has also had a version of its original Prella fabric, a gorgeous silvery-grey brocade, returned to its walls. In this room hang four full-length portraits by Whistler and Gilbert Stuart's portrait of George Washington.

The scale is more intimate on the second floor. I love the whimsy of the old ceiling in the corridor. It's cerulean blue with anthropomorphic monkeys and Chinese figures, painted by John Alden Twachtman. It echoes the new landscape fresco in the café, *Arcadia*, a landscape by Darren Waterston — both delightful and unexpected. The room I like best up here is the moss-green second-floor Sitting Room. Flemish and Dutch art has been hung in here, including [Memling's](#) *Portrait of a Man*.

I feel such pride when I come back to the Frick. I can't get a reservation in the café now. As I have done for the past 30 years, sometimes I come for a quick visit, and sometimes I immerse myself and wander. I feel like we updated everything but kept the building's spirit intact.

