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Grand Return

AFTER MORE THAN a decade's absence from Greenwich Avenue, the luxury brand Ralph Lauren made a triumphant return to downtown Greenwich, CT, on November 2009 with the opening of a new flagship store. Designed by Halper Owens Architects, in collaboration with the Polo Ralph Lauren store development team, the 19,000-sq.-ft., two-story building is located in the middle of the block at number 265, on what was once an ill-fitting, one-story gap among the eclectic mix of flat roofs and overhanging cornices. The Classical limestone Beaux Arts façade continues the multi-block of masonry structures with ground-floor storefronts and punched windows above, yet elevates the type with restrained detailing and an adapted Ionic order.

"The building really conveys Ralph Lauren," says Scott Dakin, project architect. "It is the same life-style message that Lauren has been conveying since he launched his brand in 1967 – the dream of elegance and the good life." Such elegance is evident in the 14-ft.-tall recessed arches; decorative wrought-iron balcony above the deep paneled entry archway; scrolled and bracketed window head cornice over painted wood casements at the second floor; decorative entablature; and stone balustrade. To reduce scale and distinguish the women's and men's departments, the 95-ft.-long façade is broken into two sections, each accessed by a decorative steel entrance.

Since the closure of a small licensed store on Greenwich Avenue in the 1990s, Ralph Lauren has served customers through a store in New Canaan, CT, and nearby specialty stores. Elsewhere, recent openings include Omotesando, Tokyo, in 2006; Moscow in 2007; the Dubai Mall in the United Arab Emirates in spring 2008; Avenue Montaigne in Paris and Robertson Boulevard in Los Angeles, both in fall 2008; and Madison Avenue in New York City in fall 2010.

PROJECT

Ralph Lauren Store,
Greenwich, CT

ARCHITECT

Halper Owens Architects
LLC, Greenwich, CT;
Scott Dakin, project
architect; Jon Halper,
partner in charge

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

AP Construction,
Stamford, CT; James
Barb Construction,
Albuquerque, NM

Whether large or small, each store's design program is centered on promoting the brand while maintaining the architectural heritage of the location. In Greenwich, a study of the street provided several high-style starting points for the design, in particular the Neoclassical limestone Greenwich Trust building and the limestone-and-brick W.J. Smith building – located at either end of the block. The firm also notes the influence of the iconic Polo Ralph Lauren flagship store in New York City, in the century-old Rhinelander Mansion on 72nd Street and Madison Avenue. "The scale of the rooms at the mansion was such a departure from the typical 'retail department store' experience that it really set the tone moving forward for all of Ralph Lauren's stores," says Jon Halper, partner in charge at Halper Owens Architects.

Though new construction, the Greenwich Avenue store is designed to provoke residential, rather than commercial, comparisons. "By creating a Classical limestone façade reminiscent of grand architecture of the early-20th



A deep limestone paneled archway leads to the women's department. At 6,000-sq.-ft. it is the largest section in the store and is detailed as an extension of the façade. All photos: Polo Ralph Lauren unless otherwise noted

century, that timeless quality, the visitor is immediately transported to an elegant mansion in Newport, RI, or a small maison in Paris," says Halper. "Also, this store resides in a town with an extraordinary inventory of residential architecture, which could not be overlooked. The store had to be a retreat or a destination no matter what style or size of house you were coming from."

The interior is planned, detailed and furnished to reinforce this notion. Rooms are assembled en suite, with collection rooms distributed symmetrically off



The 19,000-sq.-ft., two-story Ralph Lauren flagship store in Greenwich, CT, marks the brand's return to Greenwich Avenue after more than ten years. It was designed by Halper Owens Architects, in collaboration with the Polo Ralph Lauren store development team, and inspired by both the surrounding architecture and "the good life." Photo: Scott Reed Dakin

the central entry hall. A grand sweeping iron stair highlights the axial entry view, and the division of the ground floor into the women's and men's departments.

While the 6,000-sq.-ft. women's department is light and airy, the men's department is more club-like and a modest 1,500 sq.-ft. "The women's department is detailed as an extension of the building's façade vocabulary with limestone flooring, plaster crown moldings and paneling, accented with freestanding nickel vitrines," says Dakin. "The men's department has a more masculine approach, with reclaimed-wood floors, mahogany beams and casework and a Baronial limestone fireplace."

Upstairs, the women's salon and adjacent home area features a mix of custom and antique pieces, and works by local artists. A designated workspace allows the retail staff to work directly with interior decorators to select pieces from the collection, whose rich wallpapers, hardware, fabrics, skins and more are featured throughout the store. "This is more of an urban store idea, what they call the 'flagship variety' versus the country-store variety that you find in the Hamptons, or the one that our firm completed in New Canaan, where everything is white painted wood and bead-board ceilings – more of a summer house feeling," Dakin explains.

Above the entrance, the limestone balcony is articulated with carved lambs tongue-and-dart detailing and a carved limestone corbel with acanthus leaves. Photo: Scott Reed Dakin






A grand sweeping staircase, which features wood pilasters and beams in the Classical tradition, leads from the women's accessories gallery to the women's salon and home areas on the second floor.

Suppliers for the project included Rhodes Architectural Stone of Seattle, WA, which supplied the New Pearl Limestone for the façade and J K Cabinet of Baltimore, MD, which fabricated the wrought-ironwork, metal storefront entrances and display windows. Inside, the interior casework was constructed by Daniel DeMarco and Associates of Amityville, NY, the interior decorative plaster moldings and column capitals were supplied by the Decorator Supply Corp. of Chicago, IL, and the interior stone floor was supplied by Exquisite Surfaces of Greenwich, CT.



The women's collection room features an antique fireplace and traditional paneling and moldings.

Since the day it opened, the new Ralph Lauren store has been extremely well received by the town of Greenwich. It has given "The Avenue" a much needed lift, both commercially and emotionally, during the recent economic downturn. At a time when many others stores in the area have closed, it continues to represent the good life. — *Lynne Lavelle*

 Web Extra: Additional photos can be seen at www.traditional-building.com/extras/August2011Lauren.htm.

