

*This page: The Madison Avenue entrance of the Morgan Library & Museum, which was renovated by Renzo Piano in 2006. Opposite page: The McKim building after its own renovation, once the private study and library of financier Pierpont Morgan, is now one of the great interiors in New York.*



# DELIGHT IN THE ERUDITE

BY LILY HOAGLAND

IT WAS A BIBLIOPHILE'S dream. I had been invited to a book party, or rather, a dinner party to celebrate a book (the difference being that at the first one you mill around trying to nab passing canapés, whereas this was a sit-down, multi-course affair) at the Morgan Library, inside the McKim building. Anyone dining in this golden palace of volumes, this glittering enclave of tomes, this...well, this giant room packed with books, basically...



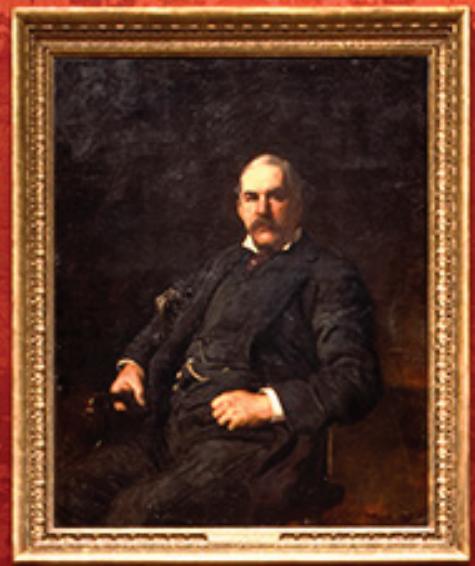


would feel their poet's soul inspired. People who treasure the smell of bound paper know how magical these places are. We were lucky enough to have a hostess who could offer this impossible setting for the evening.

Located at 225 Madison Avenue, the Morgan Library & Museum was founded upon the vast collections of financier John Pierpont Morgan, who luckily had a sharp-eyed curator in his personal librarian, Belle da Costa Greene. For several decades, the place had the atmosphere of someone's fantastical attic, with warrens of unconnected buildings holding disjointed groups of priceless prints, books, and drawings. This was the antithesis of museums like the meticulously planned Barnes Foundation, but the Morgan managed to project an

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*This page: The study, or West Room, has been enriched by a substantive display of works from the collection that surrounded Pierpont Morgan in the early 1900s, when he used the room for personal business. Opposite page: Pierpont's portrait hangs above the mantel.*





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air of authority because of its disarray: after all, if the most important aspect of a collection is its quality, why be bothered with superficial things like interior design? The museum was like academics whose frizzled hair and crooked glasses prove they would rather spend extra time in the morning on finishing a book than on their appearance.

Then, in 2006, Italian architect Renzo Piano came in and gave the place a makeover. He renovated the space to bring cohesion, exhibition space, and some much-needed light to the now-unified campus. The result was a perfect balance of intimate and expansive, where there is room to admire all of the small treasures of the collection. Freestanding display easels offer a wonderful way to closely examine the collection's impressive medieval pieces and other art, giving the viewer a more personal relationship than if it was left hanging on a wall or behind glass.

Following the success of that renovation, the McKim building, which had been Pierpont Morgan's private study and library, underwent the most extensive restoration since its construction more than one hundred years ago.

*This page: The marble surfaces and mosaic panels are signature features of the McKim rotunda. Opposite page: Visitors are now allowed to look into the vault that Morgan had built to house his favorite objects. The shelves of the vault have been filled with original storage boxes as well as books and small works of art.*



The changes included new lighting, restored period furniture, and opening Belle da Costa Greene's office to the public. This was a more modern, more approachable library, and one that reflected that McKim was indeed, as Director William M. Griswold puts it, "the heart and soul" of the museum.

The Morgan Library & Museum was reborn as one of New York's great jewels, not only offering wonderful exhibits—like the current one about everyone's favorite childhood story, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*—but also a spectacular place to hold events.

After dinner, a couple of us snuck off to the study vault. We coaxed someone to show us in, though it was very much after hours. We were absolutely not to touch anything. We swore we just wanted to peek in, and must have seemed respectable enough, because we were soon sighing with pleasure at being able to enjoy a place that had obviously been designed by and for those of us who love books.

And, despite temptations, we behaved. ♦

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*This page: The library, or East room, has a decorative ceiling by noted muralist Henry Siddons Mowbray (1858–1928). Opposite page: The room's grand fireplace and sixteenth-century tapestry, surrounded by display cases that exhibit some of the Morgan's most valued objects from its medieval holdings and renowned collections of rare books and literary, historical, and music manuscripts.*



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INTER ANHELATA SEMPER AVARVS OPES

