

David Hart Introduction to the Capitol Restoration

Becoming the Architect of the Capitol was something I would have never dreamed. In fact, in many ways, the job seemed like my worst nightmare.

In 1999, I was approached by a search committee tasked with finding an executive director for the restoration of the Utah State Capitol. The committee asked if I would consider leaving the relative comfort of my private architecture practice in Salt Lake City for the major stress of administering a multi-million dollar project that would stretch out over nearly a decade.

“No,” was my unqualified response.

Not only did I not need this kind of headache in my life, but my training was as a modernist and I knew little about the world of historic restoration. Besides, my practice was thriving and I frankly did not want the aggravation or the lengthy commitment to a single project. Nor did I want to be a bureaucrat.

Several weeks later a representative of the Capitol Preservation Board called to ask me to consider the job again. Despite my deep reservations, I consented to an interview. To my complete surprise I was eventually offered the job. And before I could turn committee members down cold again, they added a simple request:

“Just take a walk through the building,” they said. “Consider its history and the potential to return it to its former stature.”

That idea intrigued me.

That afternoon I made my way to the then dark and somewhat dingy Capitol. As I went up and down the stairs and peeked into timeworn offices and chambers, I sensed a spark inside me. Craning my neck to make out the faded seagulls and murals in the dome, a sense of the building’s significance suddenly overwhelmed me. And it was then I realized why.

The Utah State Capitol, with its murals, grounds, and architecture, stands for many important ideals that drive my life. Without the civic freedoms as well as the obligations the Capitol represents, my existence would perhaps be dominated by the selfish interests of the powerful, rather than by the more noble hopes and desires of the

people. In that glorious moment I was convinced – not that I wanted to make history, but that I wanted to preserve it.

In order to comprehend the magnitude of the Capitol restoration project, it is essential to understand, in context, the first century in the life of the building and the state. It is also important to know about a Master Plan developed to keep the building and the entire Capitol Hill Complex in exceptional condition for the next 100 years. Knowing the facts in the context of the building's history and its future gives us power to act as responsible citizens.

Contained within the pages of this commemorative book is the story of the Utah State Capitol and its original construction, accompanied by insightful perspectives on its style and design. Through words and images you will discover valuable and interesting information about the myriads of people and processes involved in this grand accomplishment. Literally thousands have contributed their remarkable skills, knowledge and talents to make the building safe and restore its stately beauty.

Finally, just like those who came to me nearly a decade ago, I will now take my turn to issue an invitation. And that is to please join me in reverencing and celebrating this beautiful edifice both in person and in the pages that follow. For it is our house, the "People's House," and forever may it be so.

(From *With Anxious Care The Restoration of the Utah State Capitol*, 2007.)