

IT'S TIME FOR PRESERVATION ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE TRACKS, TOO.

BY ROBERT KLARA

On an afternoon's walk through downtown Buffalo, New York, an architecturally minded visitor should prepare for an accelerated heart rate. For here is beautifully restored and fastidiously maintained evidence of what happened when the City Beautiful movement waltzed with industrial prosperity. The concentration of monumental structures by the likes of Daniel Burnham, Louis Sullivan, and Carrère & Hastings—plus later twentieth-century works by Rapp & Rapp and Minoru Yamasaki—explain why historians hail the city as an architectural museum.

After decades of decline, Buffalo is proud of having found the wherewithal to preserve its built legacy, and rightfully so. Good thing, then, that one scuff on its record lies well outside downtown, where visitors are scarce: Buffalo Central Terminal, its windows replaced by plywood, casts its hulking shadow over the slums of the east side. The contrast between the terminal and its pampered brethren downtown is striking visually, of course, but philosophically, too, because it raises an unsettling question: Are worthy buildings preserved solely for their cultural and aesthetic merits, or because they're fortunate enough to be located in "safe" affluent areas?

NEXT STOP, CHICAGO

For the New York Central Railroad, Buffalo was the midway point for the posh limiteds sprinting between New York City and Chicago. In 1925, believing Buffalo would expand, the Central

chose a parcel 2.5 miles outside downtown. Its station—a luminous chest of Gustavino tile, pressed-metal ornament, and four types of marble—became a talisman for Buffalo's economic might.

In a story oft told, passenger railroads began their slow roll into oblivion in the 1950s. Central Terminal saw its last train off in 1979. Subsequent owners pillaged the place. When an influential senator allotted \$1.5 million in federal funds for the terminal in 1995, Mayor Anthony Masiello diverted the money to a build-

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ing downtown. That seemed strange, because Central Terminal was quite the plum for any developer: 15 acres for parking, tower floors of 6,000 square feet each, all for the special, low price of \$1. That's what the Central Terminal Restoration Corporation (CTRC) paid for the place eight years ago.

THANKS, BUT . . .

Why no takers for Central Terminal? It's not because the trains don't stop there anymore. Whistles haven't echoed across the concourses of the Union Stations in Louisville or St. Louis since the 1970s, either—yet both currently house opulent hotels and those cities' finest restaurants. Nor is it due to lack of

effort by preservationists. The CTCRC has spent its modest donations on patching the roof and sweeping up, and used \$25,000 given by a local bank to repurchase the terminal's concourse clock, which turned up on eBay in 1999. Nor, apparently, is it due to a lack of change in the state coffers—which have coughed up \$100 million for H.H. Richardson's Buffalo Psychiatric Center.

So what is it? In a word, location. East Buffalo is poor. Crime rates are high. Even though the terminal property has advantages undreamed of downtown (such as easy interstate access), it's a matter of how one views a half-filled glass. "It's not downtown, it's in the wrong part of town: We've heard all the flip answers," laments CTCRC president Russell Pawlak. "There's this notion that you're going to die if you go there," says Tim Tielman, executive director of the Campaign for Greater Buffalo, another preservation group. "We have to keep plugging away," concludes the CTCRC's treasurer Michael Miller. "Eventually the right person with the right connections will come along."

Really? Will Buffalo get a visionary who will take a chance? Because the persisting failure—of the city, of developers—to rescue the terminal isn't just a missed economic opportunity, it's an occlusion of the historic record. Much is lost when the architectural heritage that visitors are shown is limited to those buildings within a stone's throw of a Starbucks. But in East Buffalo, for now at least, a stone's throw only means another broken window. ■

