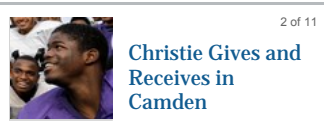




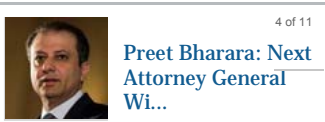
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Chasing Rainbows at Historic Space

The Refurbished Rainbow Room Reopens Wednesday

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By MARSHALL HEYMAN

Sept. 30, 2014 10:04 p.m. ET



Guy Lombardo, right, leads his band as famed bandleader Lawrence Welk, center, and Gila Rosenhouse dance in 1971. Associated Press

The refurbished Rainbow Room officially reopens on Wednesday, but hundreds of black-tie-clad folks got a sneak peek at the 80-year-old space on Monday, a little more than five years after the economic downturn prompted it to close.

The attendees, many from the architecture and interior-design worlds, were patrons of Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation, an organization founded in 1991 that educates the public about architecture and the arts. It also supports the Soane Museum in London, a structure you just might be able to see if you gazed from the panoramic views of the terrace at SixtyFive, the Rainbow Room's adjacent bar and restaurant.

We jest, of course. But this is a pretty spectacular sight for year-round sunset Instagram photos, especially with new 8½-foot-tall glass panels as well as floor pavers with a snow-melt system.

Soane was an architect who lived about the same time as Thomas Jefferson, perhaps best known for designing the Bank of England.

"He was not an easy man to get along with," said Chippy Irvine, a guest who once served as president of the foundation's board. "He was crotchety, but he was likable. And he was a very, very, very good architect."

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Gala guests at the Rainbow Room on Monday. *N. Scott Rabin for The Wall Street Journal*

One of the many guests was Michael Gabellini of Gabellini Sheppard Associates, which took on the project of making over the Rainbow Room on the 65th floor of 30 Rockefeller Plaza.

The Rainbow Room itself was landmarked by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, so there have been no major architectural changes.

"Originally it was a creation. This is a re-creation," Mr. Gabellini said. "It's about moving history through time and rekindling the memory of having been here. The bands, the singers, it was a who's who. It's about putting yourself back in a 1930s space."

The original room, he added, was envisioned as the upper berth of an Art-Deco ship, a sort of observation deck. The original chandeliers and sconces remain, though one chandelier had to be refabricated.

The mechanics of the revolving dance floor, 30 feet in diameter, have been upgraded, as has the sound system. Many of the railings are original, said Mr. Gabellini, but about three-quarters of the lead crystal balls on them are new, fabricated in the Czech Republic.

The blinds on the 15-foot windows, however, were removed to make way for three-stranded crystal curtains, each featuring about 1,200 crystals.

"When you're here during the day, they glow and are prismatic," Mr. Gabellini said. "They reflect like a rainbow."

The rest of the Egyptian Art-Deco space "had to feel as if it had been here," the architect added, from the walls, which are made of Eramosa marble that resembles rosewood, to the floors, which have an equally retro-modern feel.



The Rainbow Room has its original chandeliers and sconces, as well as walls of Eramosa marble. *N. Scott Rabin for The Wall Street Journal*

After Wednesday, when the Rainbow Room hosts a party for about 500 guests, including David Rockefeller Jr., Rob and [Jerry Speyer](#), Regis Philbin and Barbara Cook, it will be open to the public for Sunday brunch and Monday evenings for dinner. SixtyFive is open from 5 p.m. to midnight during the week.

The gala on Monday honored the architects David Adjaye and Phyllis Lambert, and in homage to Soane, each table in the Rainbow Room featured a small Soane doll

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underneath a glass display. The dolls were handmade—sewn, stuffed and painted—especially for the evening by Hudson Valley-based folk artist Gladys Boalt and her craftswomen.

The idea for the dolls, sold by silent auction, came from Maggie Carey, a board member of Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation who owns about 150 of Ms. Boalt's ornaments. She tracked the artist down, asked her if she could take on the project and brought her a copy of an 1829 portrait of Soane by Thomas Lawrence which hangs at the Soane in London.

"We changed his vest and made it more colorful," said Ms. Carey of the end result, as waiters passed lobster rolls and roast chicken and morels morsels that came with their own pipettes. You were instructed to eat them in one bite while simultaneously squeezing the juice into your mouth, then put the pipette back on the waiter's tray. So the night wasn't just about education in the fine arts, but also in new dining experiences.

After taking a gander at the lit-up city over at SixtyFive, Mr. Gabellini went back to check on the party, which by now was in full swing. He has spent so much time with the Rainbow Room empty and under construction, he said, "it's really nice to see it animated again."

Write to Marshall Heyman at marshall.heyman@wsj.com

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