

White Paper

Eldridge Street Synagogue
A truly collaborative transformation

Arthur Femenella





The synagogue of Khal Adath Jeshrun in conjunction with Anshe Lubz, better known as the Eldridge Street Synagogue, is the first and considered by many architectural historians, the finest synagogue erected in the lower east side of Manhattan by the east European Ashkenazi Jews.

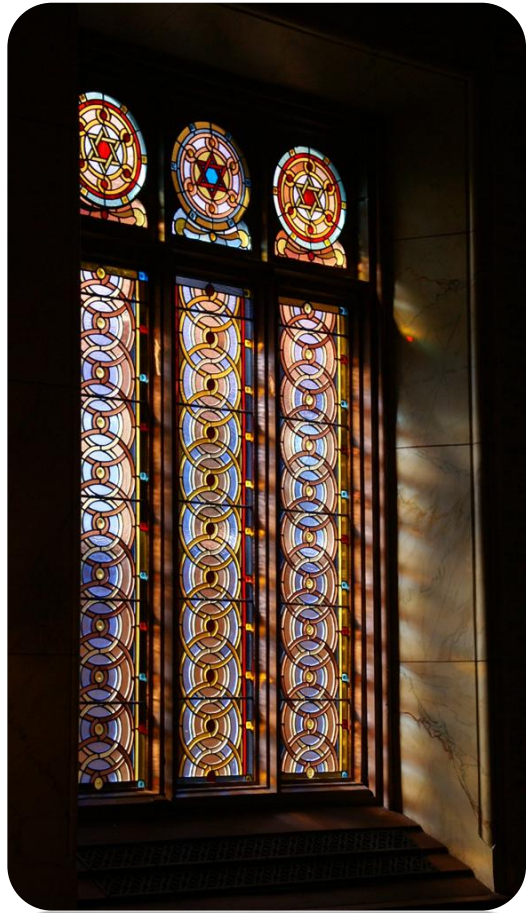
The synagogue was built in 1887, designed by Peter and Francis Herter recent immigrants from Germany.

The building reflects the European training of the architects comprising elements of Gothic, Romanesque and Moorish styles. The use of the Magen David throughout the interior and exterior of the building reflects its religious purpose. The inclusion of the five sided star in the decorative scheme paid homage to the religious freedom found in America that was so desired by the Ashkenazi. The façade of the building features brick with terra cotta details, richly-colored leaded glass windows and fine architectural woodwork. The interior is richly decorated with brass and blown glass chandeliers and wall sconces, decorative painting on all plaster surfaces and a magnificent walnut and velvet ark that houses the Torah scrolls.

While the synagogue thrived for many decades, in the 1950's a diminishing congregation and the lack of local support resulted in the deterioration of the building fabric. The sanctuary was sealed from the balance of the building. There were holes in the roof, pigeons roosted with impunity and the glorious leaded glass windows were covered with the dust and the grime of the city. In 1986, well known New York preservationist and writer Roberta Gratz joined forces with attorney William Josephson and formed the not-for-profit, nonsectarian Eldridge



Street Project. Ultimately, the funds raised enabled the full restoration of the synagogue to its former glory. Femenella & Associates, Inc was part of the construction team that restored the original synagogue windows and also on the design/build team that fabricated a new window for the sanctuary that was the vision of Kiki Smith and Debora Gans.



One of the original leaded glass windows restored by The Gil Studio working with Femenella & Associates

Under the direction of Walter Sedovic Architects and Terry Higgins, President of T. Higgins Construction, Femenella & Associates worked with The Gil Studio to restore all of the original leaded glass windows and wood frames. Femenella restored the steel lay light frame and replicated missing wood moldings as part of this work. We also provided interior and exterior scaffolding for the front and side facades.





Great East window designed by Kiki Smith and Debora Gans, executed by The Gil Studio and Femenella & Associates.

The east window of the sanctuary was destroyed in a storm in the 1940's. There is no photo documentation of what the original window was. In 2010, after much research, soul searching, and brain storming, a new window was commissioned by the design team of artist Kiki Smith and architect Debora Gans. Working closely with Tim Allanbrook, Senior Consultant from Wiss, Janey, Elster Associates in New York, Femenella & Associates engineered, fabricated and installed the custom 16' diameter frame to support the window. Bonnie Dimun, Executive Director and Amy Stein Milford, Deputy Director of the Museum were both intimately involved in the project and were a joy to work with. The panels were fabricated at The Gil Studio directed by Tom Garcia with Audrey Morrell as the chief artisan.





One of the panels during fabrication at The Gil Studio.

The panel is made of two layers of hand blown flashed glass that have been acid etched, silver stained and decorated with gold leaf stars. These two layers of glass are then laminated onto a piece of 3/8" thick laminated safety glass employing a process that was developed in Germany. Each panel weighed in excess of 300 lbs



Assembled steel frame flying into position.



Due to site logistical restraints, the frame parts were welded together in a neighbor's parking lot and then hoisted with a 100' crane into final position. The frame weighed 6,000 lbs. and had to be threaded through a 10" wide gap between the scaffold and the building. Direction and contracting of this work was provided by Femenella & Associates.



Installation of first panel into the installed frame. Photo courtesy of Kate Milford.

The Project at Eldridge Street Synagogue was a true collaboration between architect, designers, engineer, project manager, contractors and owners. All demanded the best of each other while maintaining mutual respect. In the end, the success of this team speaks for itself in the visual grandeur that has been returned to this important piece of architectural heritage and testament to Jewish history.

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About Femenella & Associates

Arthur Femenella is the President of Femenella & Associates, Inc., a full service stained glass and historic window conservation studio. Mr. Femenella began as an apprentice in 1968 at the Greenland Studio of New York and later became co-owner. In 1988 he joined forces with Jack Cushen and developed the Jack Cushen Studio. Both studios went on to be highly respected for stained glass conservation.

Arthur formed Femenella & Associates in 1993 to address a new way to approach conservation projects. The firm has expanded to include historic wood and steel window restoration. He has been responsible for the restoration of thousands of windows, doors, panels and artifacts, including hundreds of works by John La Farge, Louis Comfort Tiffany, Frank Lloyd Wright, Maitland Armstrong, Mary Tillinghast and other artists of equal importance. Mr. Femenella is active in a number of preservation groups and he lectures across the country. The firm is an approved provider of AIA/CES learning credits.

Mr. Femenella is a founder, past President and Vice-President of the American Glass Guild, LLC; a past Chair of the Restoration Committee, former Board Member and former Treasurer of the Stained Glass Association of America. In this capacity, Mr. Femenella was the primary author of the booklet *Standards and Guidelines for the Preservation of Historic Stained Glass Windows*. Mr. Femenella sat on the Board of Governors of the Census of Stained Glass Windows in America, and was the primary author of the technical section of the booklet produced by the Census titled, *The Conservation of Historic Stained Glass: An Owner's Guide*. He is a Board Member of APTI, a member of the National Trust and the AIC, with a pending application for Professional Associate status.

Arthur Femenella has written over forty articles on subjects specific to stained glass and historic window restoration. He has presented papers at numerous international and national symposiums and conferences. Art was the consultant to the Protective Glazing Task Force. This was a group of architects, engineers, and preservationists charged by the Department of the Interior to develop national guidelines for the fabrication and installation of protective glazing.

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