

Chicago Stock Exchange Trading Room
Art Institute of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois 1977

The Chicago Stock Exchange Trading Room was Vinci's first major restoration project as an independent architect, and it remains one of his most audacious commissions – a restoration cum re-creation that allowed him to test his skills against those of the architect he had spent nearly two decades studying: Louis Sullivan.

The seven-thousand-square-foot room was once the highlight of Adler & Sullivan's 1894 Chicago Stock Exchange Building, which – by late 1971 – was a ruined space hidden within a historic building doomed to demolition.

During this period, Vinci was hired by the Art Institute of Chicago to salvage fragments of the building's ornamentation. The mission shifted when he advocated saving not only isolated pieces but the entire remains of the former Trading Room for reconstruction at the museum.

"I realized the room gave context to the fragments, and that it ultimately told a bigger story," he said.

The Art Institute agreed and so began what remains the largest, most complex re-creation of a Louis Sullivan interior ever attempted.

Working with a team that included his professional partner Lawrence Kenny, the photographer Richard Nickel, the architect Patrick FitzGerald, and the interior designer Robert Furhoff, Vinci began removing the surviving Trading Room elements and preparing them for reassembly and restoration.

The work included the removal of fragile plaster ornamentation, about two hundred art-glass skylight panels and their supporting iron framework, and expanses of Sullivan's decorative stenciling.

Most of what survived had been protected above a dropped ceiling. The rest – which included everything from the oak floor, mahogany paneling, and octagonal columns to the light fixtures, chalkboards, and clock – was missing altogether and had to be re-created using vintage photos and contemporary descriptions as starting points.

The original room had been a showcase for one of Sullivan's most extravagant displays of decorative stenciling. Representative examples of most patterns still survived, either on shards of filthy canvas still clinging to the ceiling, or beneath layers of paint on the walls.

"I spent one whole summer stripping layers of paint off the stencils and then redrawing them," said Robert Furhoff.

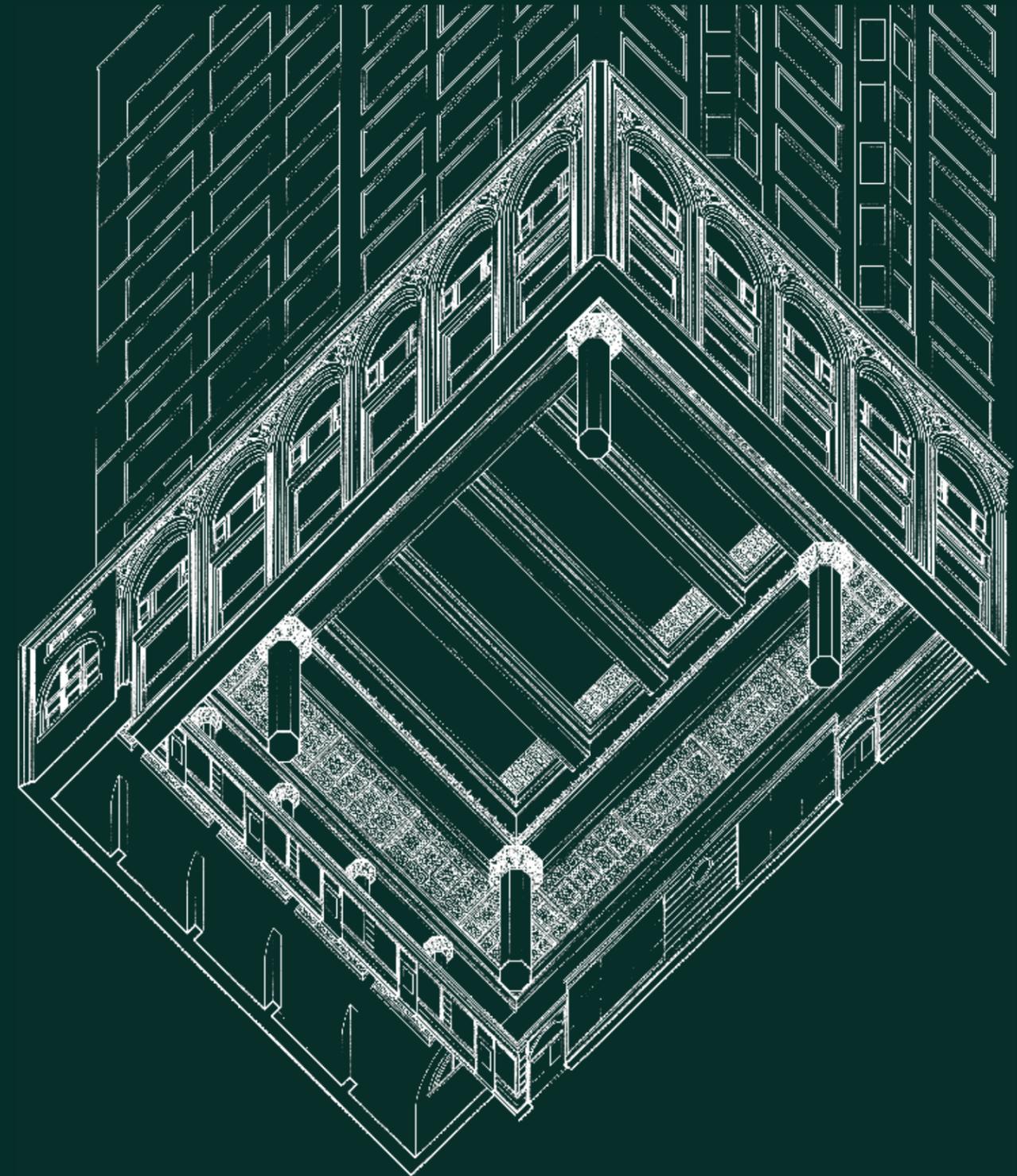
One of the more complex patterns ultimately involved fifty-two different "cuts" or colors that had to be laid down sequentially in order to complete the design.

The ceiling in particular is spectacular and also provides a side-by-side comparison with the original. Enough restorable ceiling canvas was saved to cover one of the four ceiling bays. The other three bays are reproductions, displaying the original unfaded colors.

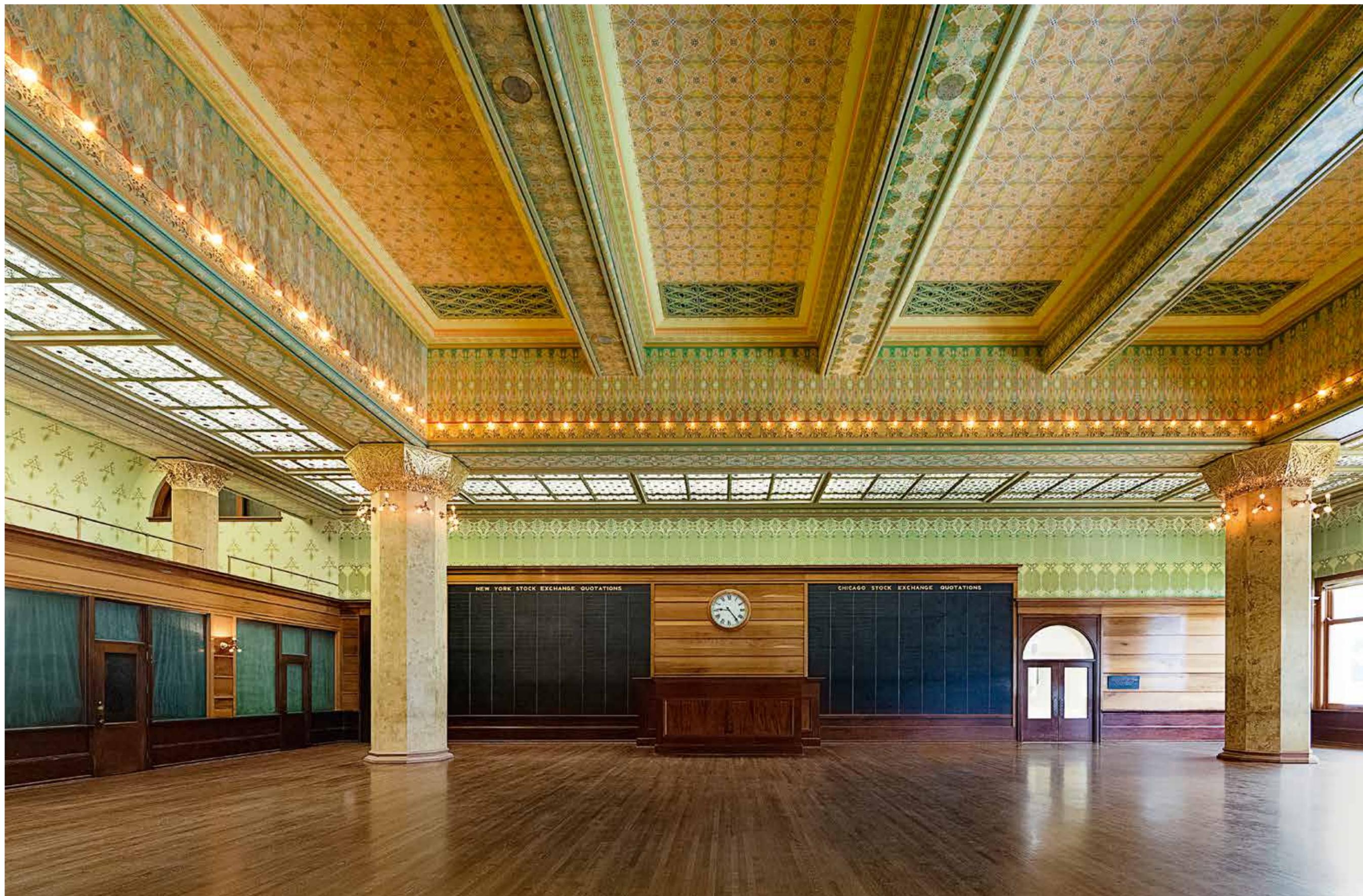
Re-creating the original decorative scheme also involved researching and relearning scagliola, a nineteenth-century plastering technique used to create various faux finishes. Here, it gives the room's four octagonal columns the appearance of being made of rare marble.

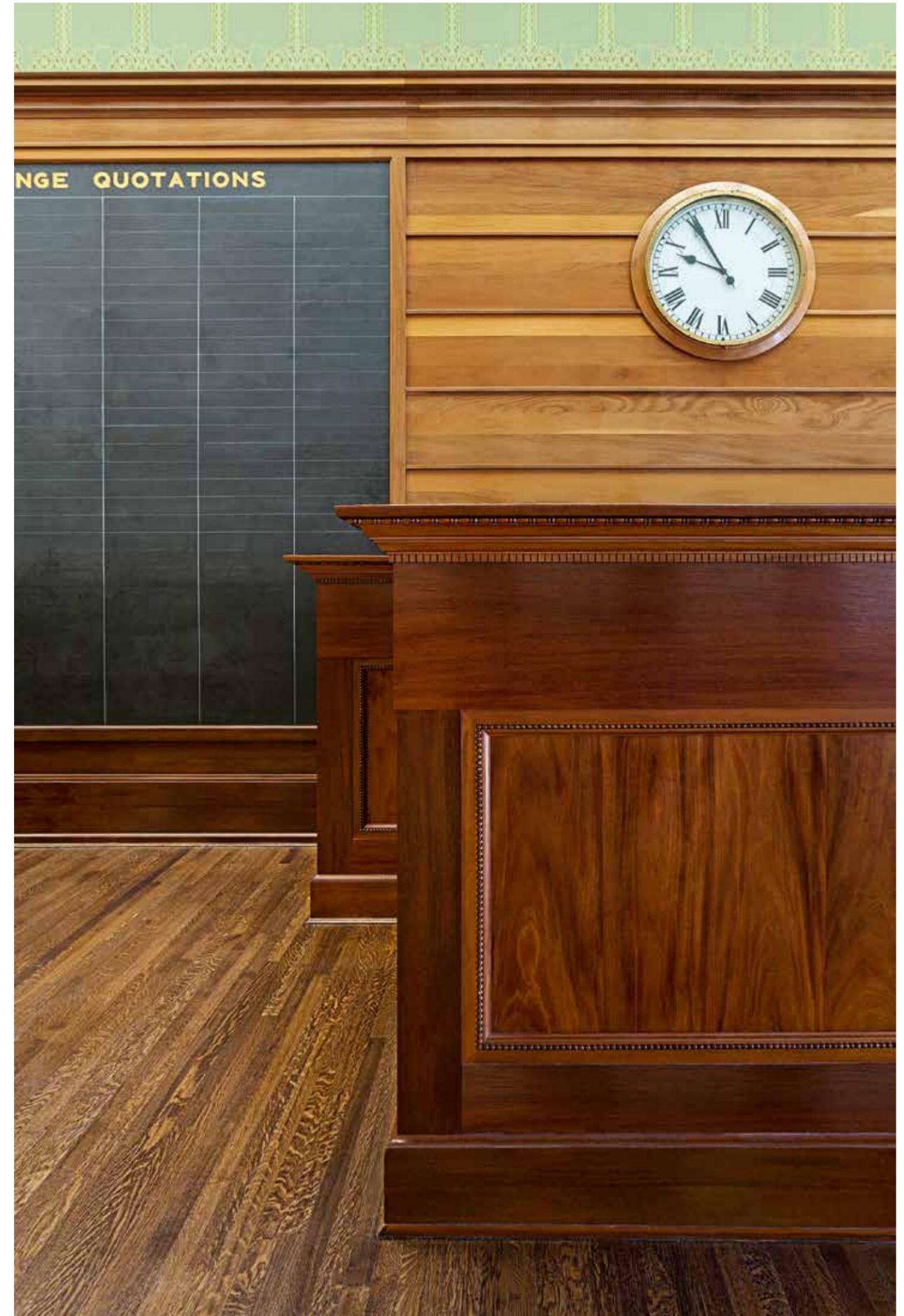
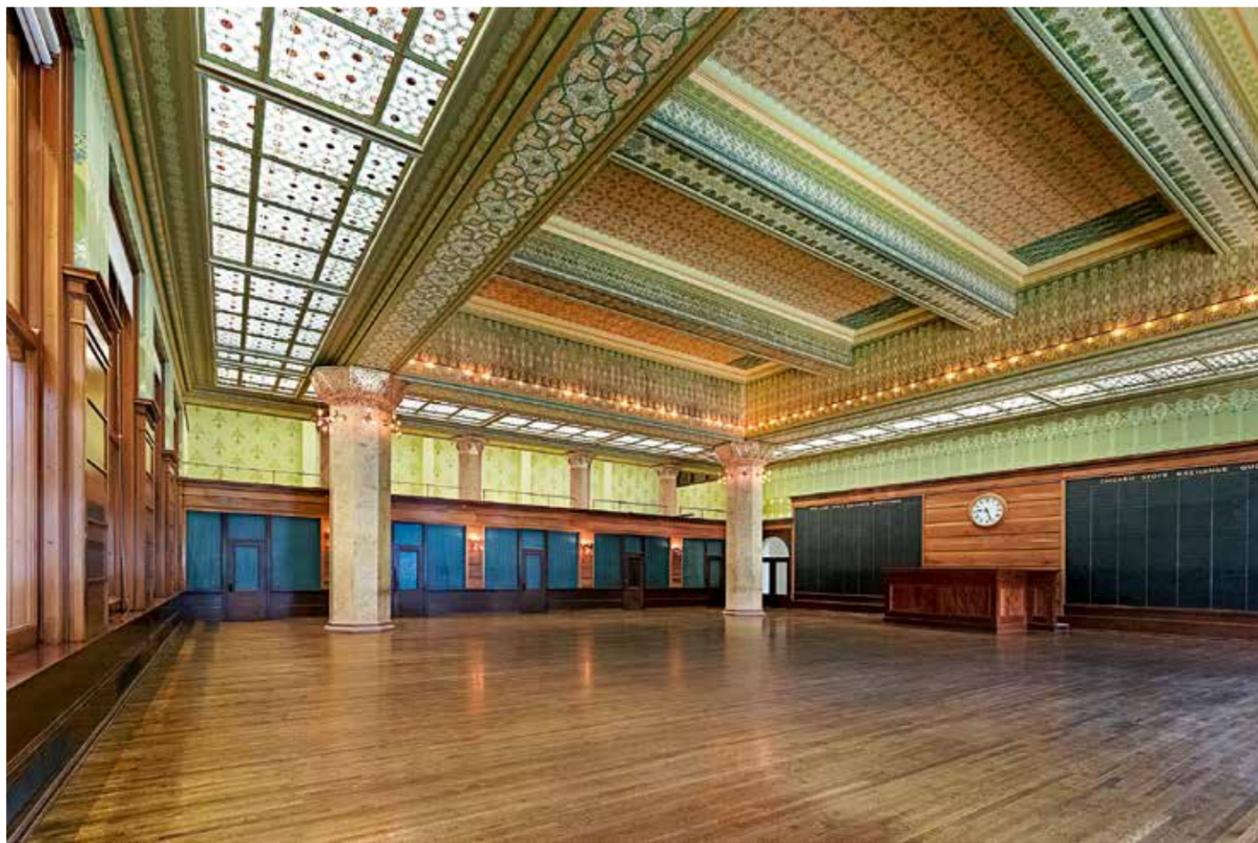
Salvaging the original materials took three months. Then began a four-year waiting period while the Art Institute raised funds for the new wing that would contain the room. Vinci began installing the re-created room in 1977 and it opened with a reception in 1978.

In 1980, the project won an Honor Award from the Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.



Above: Drawing by Lawrence Kenny showing the original orientation of the Trading Room.



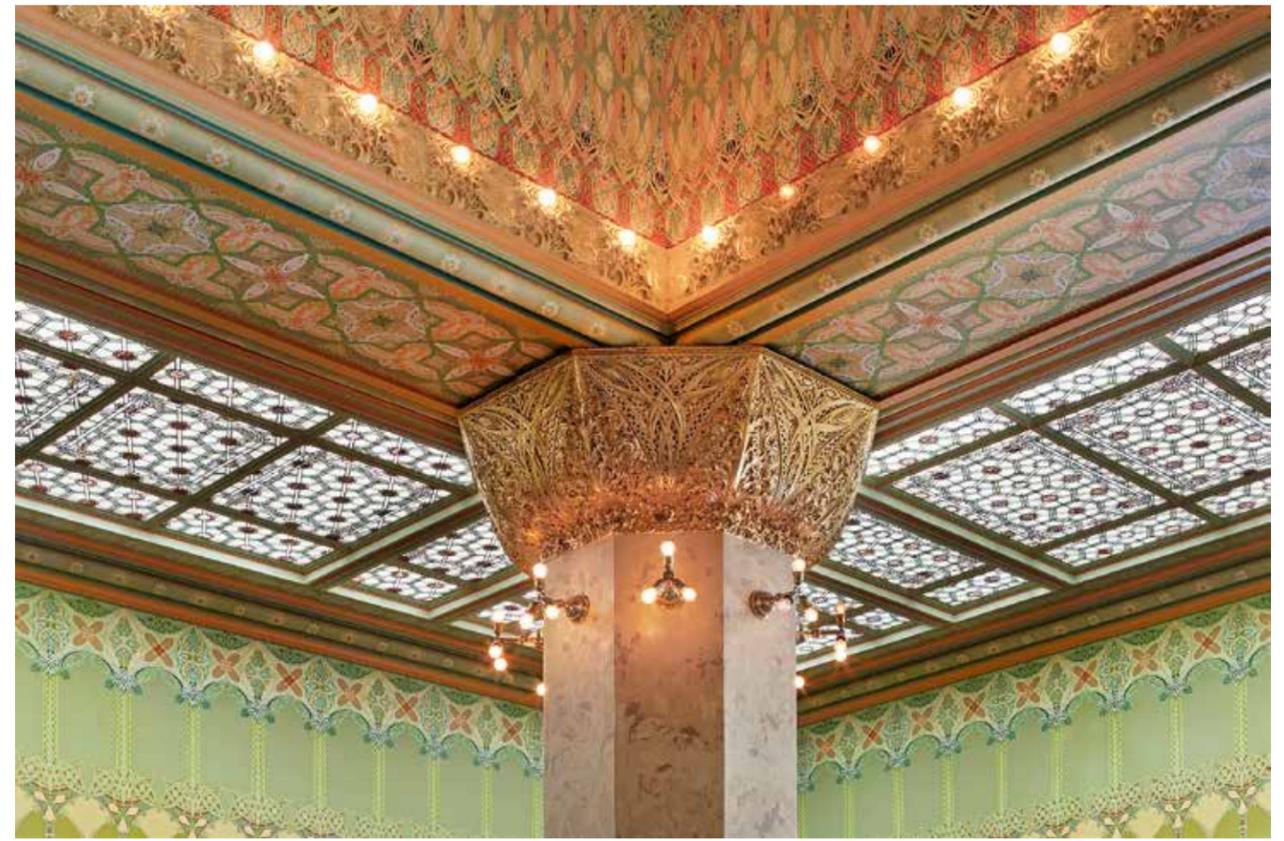
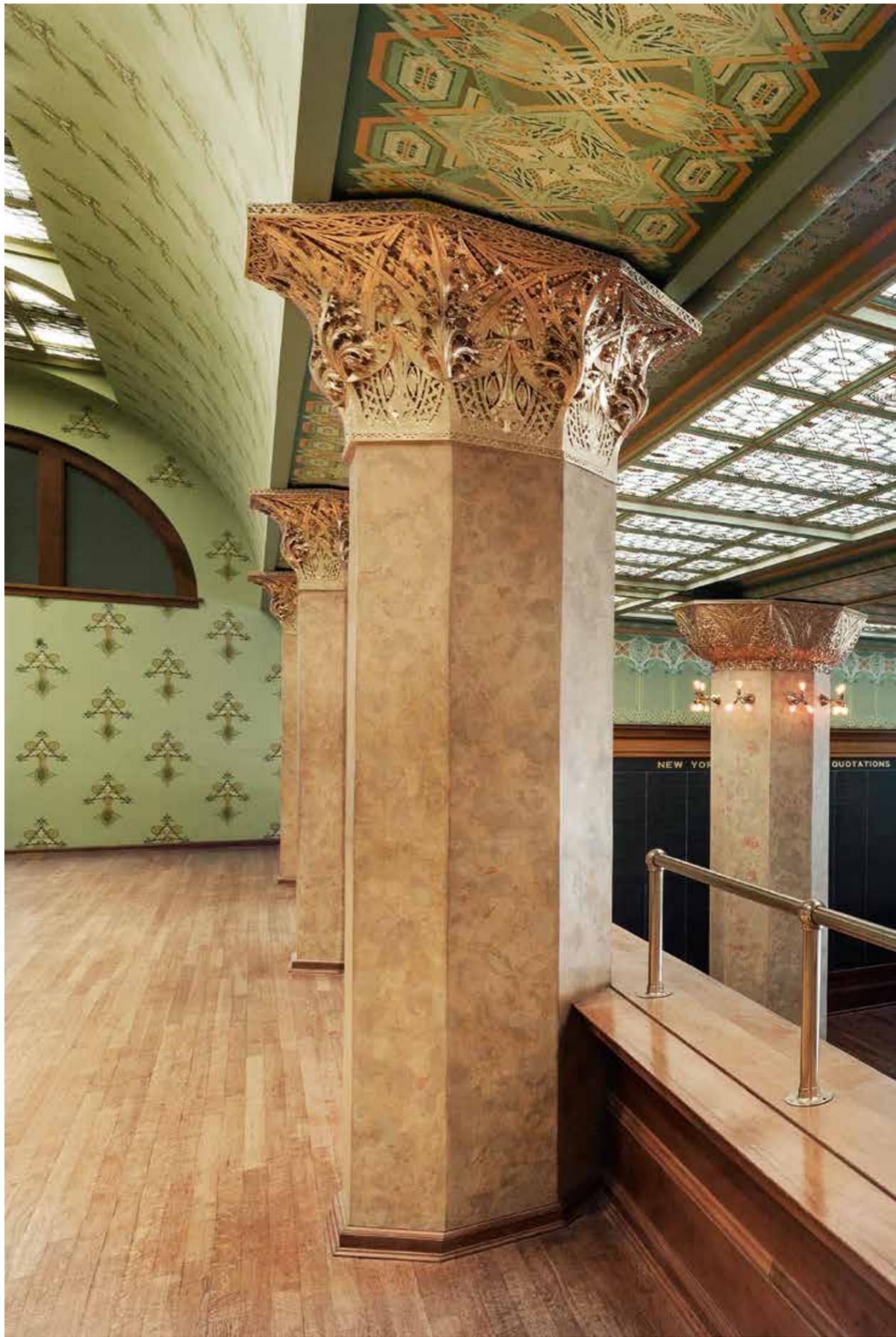


Previous spread: The re-created Chicago Stock Exchange Trading Room at the Art Institute of Chicago. The original elements consist of two column capitals, approximately two hundred art-glass skylights, and the far left bay of the ceiling.

Above top: The Trading Room now serves as a banquet hall and special event space for the Art Institute of Chicago.

Above: Archival photos from before (left) and after (right) an early twentieth-century renovation project were used to re-create the Trading Room's original decorative scheme.

Right: The installation of the mahogany main desk in 1980 – three years after the room opened to the public – completed the Trading Room restoration project. No photos of the original desk were found, so Vinci based the design on a written description from the period.

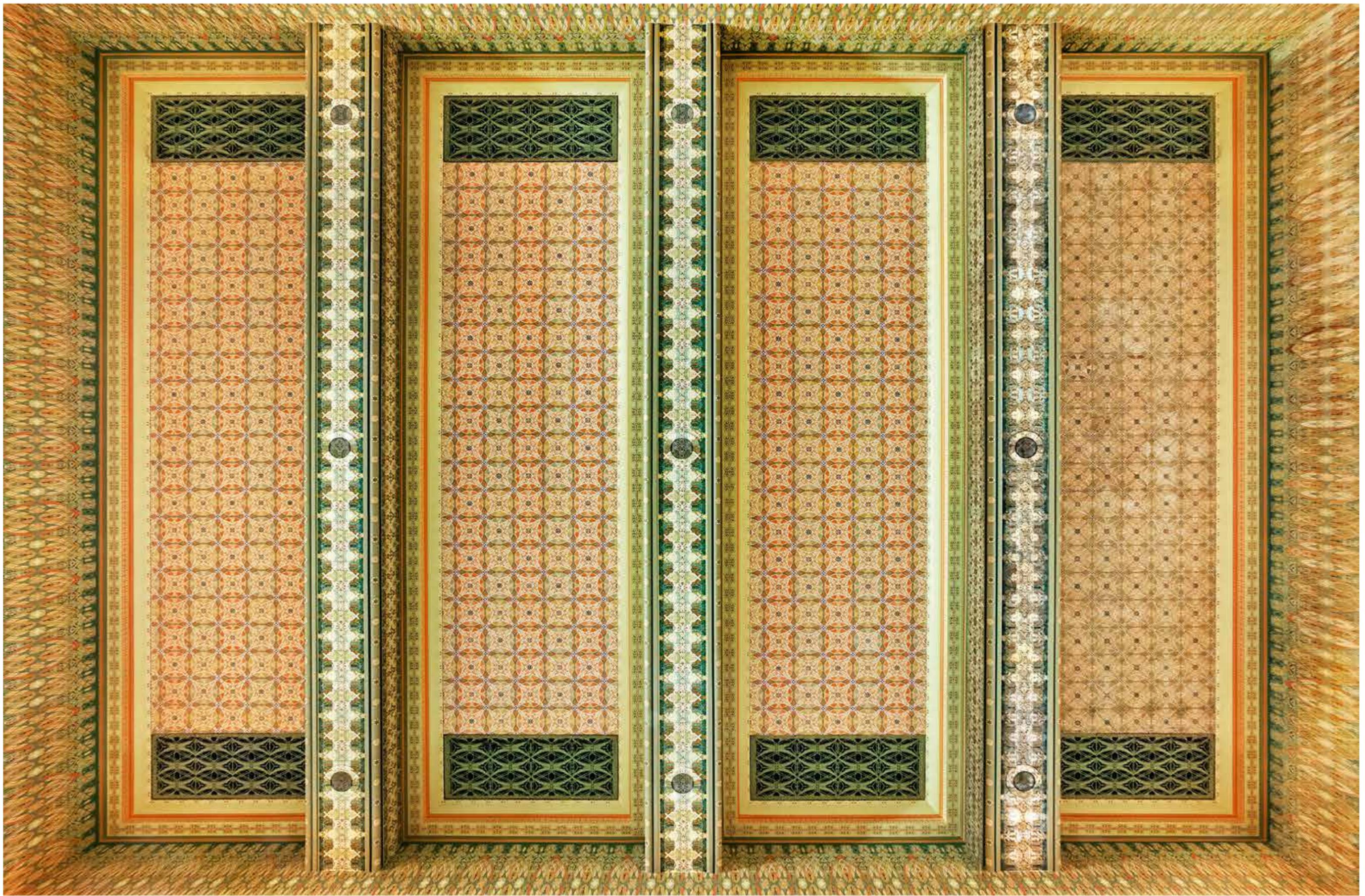


Left and above: Vinci used scagliola – a nineteenth-century plastering technique – to re-create the Trading Room's faux marble columns.

Right: The Trading Room's original elements were found above a dropped ceiling.

Far right: An unidentified artisan installs the re-created stencils, some of which had fifty-two colors.





Above: The left three bays of the Trading Room's spectacular ceiling are re-creations while the darker far right panel was pieced together from original fragments.