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Press Release

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[Metro-North](#)

IMMEDIATE

### Renovations Complete at Grand Central Terminal's "Whispering Gallery"

#### *Popular Attraction Attracts Attention of Tourists and New Yorkers Alike*

Cleaning and restoration of the famed Guastavino tile ceiling of the Grand Central Terminal's popular "whispering gallery" is complete, MTA Metro-North Railroad announced Monday.

The whispering gallery, in front of the Oyster Bar restaurant on the Lower Level, is an acoustical anomaly that allows visitors to stand in diagonal corners of the 50-foot wide chamber and whisper to one another as the sound carries across the arc of the domed ceiling.

"This restoration is further proof of Metro-North's dedicated stewardship of this great Terminal, which celebrates its centennial on February 1, 2013," said Metro-North President Howard Permut. "We intend to maintain, preserve and improve this great edifice so that it endures for another 100 years and beyond."

The \$450,000 project was completed on time and on budget just in time for the busy holiday season, when it is not unusual for nearly a million people to pass through Grand Central Terminal in a given day.

Loose tiles were reattached and pinned in place and the raised mortar between the herringbone-patterned tile work was replaced and cleaned leaving the whole 2,000-square-foot chamber brighter and cleaner.

"The job was accomplished one quadrant at a time with little impact on pedestrian flow and no impact on the whispering effect," said George Monasterio, Chief Architect for Metro-North, which operates and maintains Grand Central. "This restoration project was accomplished by hand, tile by tile, by masonry specialists from Graciano Corp., of Pittsburgh, PA."

Graciano Corp. was the contractor in 2000 that restored the Guastavino tile vaults under the 59th Street Queensboro Bridge, a contemporary of Grand Central which was completed in 1910, three years before the Terminal. The Manhattan side of the bridge features a series of soaring, cathedral-like vaults designed to house an open-air market, but now housing a restaurant called Guastavino's.

"Guastavino" refers to a method and material patented by Rafael Guastavino, an immigrant from the Catalonia region of Spain, who arrived in New York in 1881. His domes and vaults are seen in many places around New York City, including the City Hall subway station, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the Elephant House at the Bronx Zoo, as well as the 59th Street Bridge.

Guastavino's method of arch construction uses layers of thin, glazed terracotta tiles set in mortar in a herringbone pattern. The tiles are naturally fireproof and as strong as steel or wooden beams but weigh much less.

About 200 tiles needed to be replaced and new ones were painstakingly duplicated in the Guastavino style (the family business closed in 1962) by Boston Valley Terra Cotta of Buffalo, NY.

The color, width and the depth of the ridges and the size of the tiles themselves are distinct. The tiles in Grand Central are 11½" by 6" flat tiles and are bisque white. The tiles are fabricated from clay and a special recipe for texture and color is used for a precise match with existing tiles.

Metro-North ordered 250 tiles to have some in reserve. The former taxi stand on the Vanderbilt Avenue side of the building also has a Guastavino ceiling.

The ceiling in the adjacent 7,000-square foot Oyster Bar restaurant, plus the 2,200-square-foot kitchen, will be repaired under a separate project that is not yet scheduled.