

The New York Times



JOSHUA BRIGHT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Workers seal the acrylic pavilion designed by the architect Jean Nouvel that houses Jane's Carousel at Brooklyn Bridge Park.

A Ride With Head-Spinning Views

By JOYCE WADLER

THE journey from an Ohio theme park to Brooklyn has been long and difficult for 48 wooden horses, who today are scheduled to trot, canter, leap — O.K., be wheeled — from the Dumbo studio of Jane Walentas, the artist who spent over 20 years overseeing their restoration, to their permanent home, a carousel in Brooklyn Bridge Park. It opens on Sept. 16 and will be called, naturally, Jane's Carousel.

It's a pretty dramatic location, between the Man-

hattan and Brooklyn bridges, and the carousel will be sheltered in a pretty ritzy pavilion, a \$9 million transparent acrylic jewel box by the French architect Jean Nouvel. The horses, originally installed in a theme park in Youngstown in 1922, are now looking pretty good themselves: Their glass eyes glitter; they have brass tags denoting their fine lineage, the Philadelphia Toboggan Company; they're costumed in sweet sherbet colors of peach and tangerine. There's a palomino here, a bay there, a line of ponies. Each is different: one, perhaps an Ameri-

can Indian pony, has two feathers on its decorative, or what carousel aficionados call its "romantic" side, the one that is visible to spectators. Another has a shawl across its back and a clutch of roses at the saddle. A Gypsy woman's horse, no doubt.

Ms. Walentas, a onetime art director at Estée Lauder, began restoring the carousel soon after she and her husband, David, bought it in 1984. And since Mr. Walentas developed much of Dumbo, Brooklyn (he also contributed \$3.5 million to com-

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plete the area of Brooklyn Bridge Park that will contain the carousel), Ms. Walentas could afford the best. For the difficult free-hand pin striping on the bridles of the horses she called Mercedes-Benz and brought in a fellow who did car detailing. The gold on the horses is actual gold leaf. But she also did much of the grunt work herself, meticulously scraping off layers of paint to find original design and colors. The work

seemed to be endless.

"When we moved over here 12 years ago, I felt I had to finish this thing, and I hired people who could help me," Ms. Walentas said this week in her Dumbo studio, where she was dressed in pink jeans and a gray sweatshirt, and where the horses, not yet moved to the riverside, were lined up like Rockettes. "Two years after we moved here, we were still scraping the paint. I hired a young lady who was a sculptress to help me scrape

paint two days a week."

Couldn't she have hired somebody to scrape off the paint?

"What can I tell you?" she said. "Ronald Lauder used to tell me my image was a detriment to my career. I wasn't a hippie, but I am an artist."

And later, "I was brought up to finish stuff. I felt very driven by it. Two busloads of people from Youngstown came to visit these horses two years ago, telling me 'I got engaged on it,' 'I had my first date on it,' or to visit their fa-

vorite horse. I felt I had to find a home for it, even when we didn't know where it would go."

New York City has a number of historic carousels: a restored 1908 carousel in Central Park; a carousel dating to 1912 in Prospect Park; the 92-year-old B&B Carousel in Coney Island, which is being restored and is expected to return to Coney Island in 2013. Jane's Carousel was bought as part of David Walentas's plan to turn the waterfront beneath the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges, then abandoned, into a marina and shopping complex. The carousel had been damaged in a fire at Idora Park in Youngstown and was badly battered. But Ms. Walentas, who had looked over a half-dozen old carousels, liked that it contained all original work.

"Very often horses or rounding boards — scenery panels — would get broken up and have to be replaced," she said. "Here this was not the case. The carving was beautiful, and the whole carousel was very elaborate. The company's carousels were all numbered, this one is No. 61. The next one, No. 62, is at the Santa Monica Pier."

The Walentases paid \$385,000. The one part of the carousel they left behind was the wooden building that had housed it. "It was just very ordinary," Ms. Walentas said. The waterfront site, she added, "was very spectacular, and I felt we needed something very exciting and elegant."

The plan to build a marina and shopping complex died under community opposition, replaced by plans for a park. For some years the Walentases did not know what would become of the carousel. When they finally found political support for putting it in the park, they hired Mr. Nouvel, a Pritzker Prize winner.

"I decided we just couldn't do a typical nostalgic carousel building of the amusement park genre," Ms. Walentas said.

Mr. Nouvel's pavilion is an acrylic box, 72 feet on each wall with a 26-foot-high ceiling. The square shape was his idea.

"We were so uptight about it, we didn't think anybody would approve it," Ms. Walentas said. "We made him design a round building, he kind of agreed, but as it got closer, he came to us and said: 'I cannot do this round building. It is not architecture. It will not look right on this site. Don't make me do it.'"



Jane Walentas with some of the lovingly refurbished carousel horses in her studio in Dumbo, Brooklyn. Below left, the carousel's permanent home in Brooklyn Bridge Park.



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In this reporter's opinion, Mr. Nouvel was right. But they paid \$9 million for a box?

"Apparently \$9 million and counting," Ms. Walentas said dryly. "We didn't pay *him* \$9 million, it's the engineering and the materials. The acrylic alone was in excess of a million."

It was time to call the architect, interrupting him — for he is French and on Tuesday it was still August — on vacation on the Spanish isle of Ibiza.

One could call say his pavilion is just a clear, square box, he was told, after a little polite chit-chat. Where's the architecture?

Mr. Nouvel laughed.

"Yes, we can say this of a lot of glass houses," he said.

He spoke, in English heavily accented with French, of using acrylic rather than glass because it created slight distortion as one looked in or out. He spoke of the way the framing of the doors changed the parameters of the

space. He refers to the carousel as "the bijou" — the jewel — in the middle of the box.

"It is very interesting in so precious a spot, in the landscape in front of the brutal architecture of Dumbo with the warehouses and the bridges," Mr. Nouvel said.

He also mentioned something that Ms. Walentas has not: At night, when the carousel is closed, the images of the horses will be projected against white shades within the pavilion.

"The shadows of the horses will be turning on all the parameters of the building," Mr. Nouvel said. "You will have like a magic lantern, the horses turning on the four walls."

Rides on the carousel will be free for children under 3 accompanied by adults, \$2 for everyone older. It will be open everyday but Tuesday, from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Let the dancing horses begin throwing their shadows.