

25

**Midtown
Community
Court**

Artist Jason Das created this painting to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Midtown Community Court in 2013.

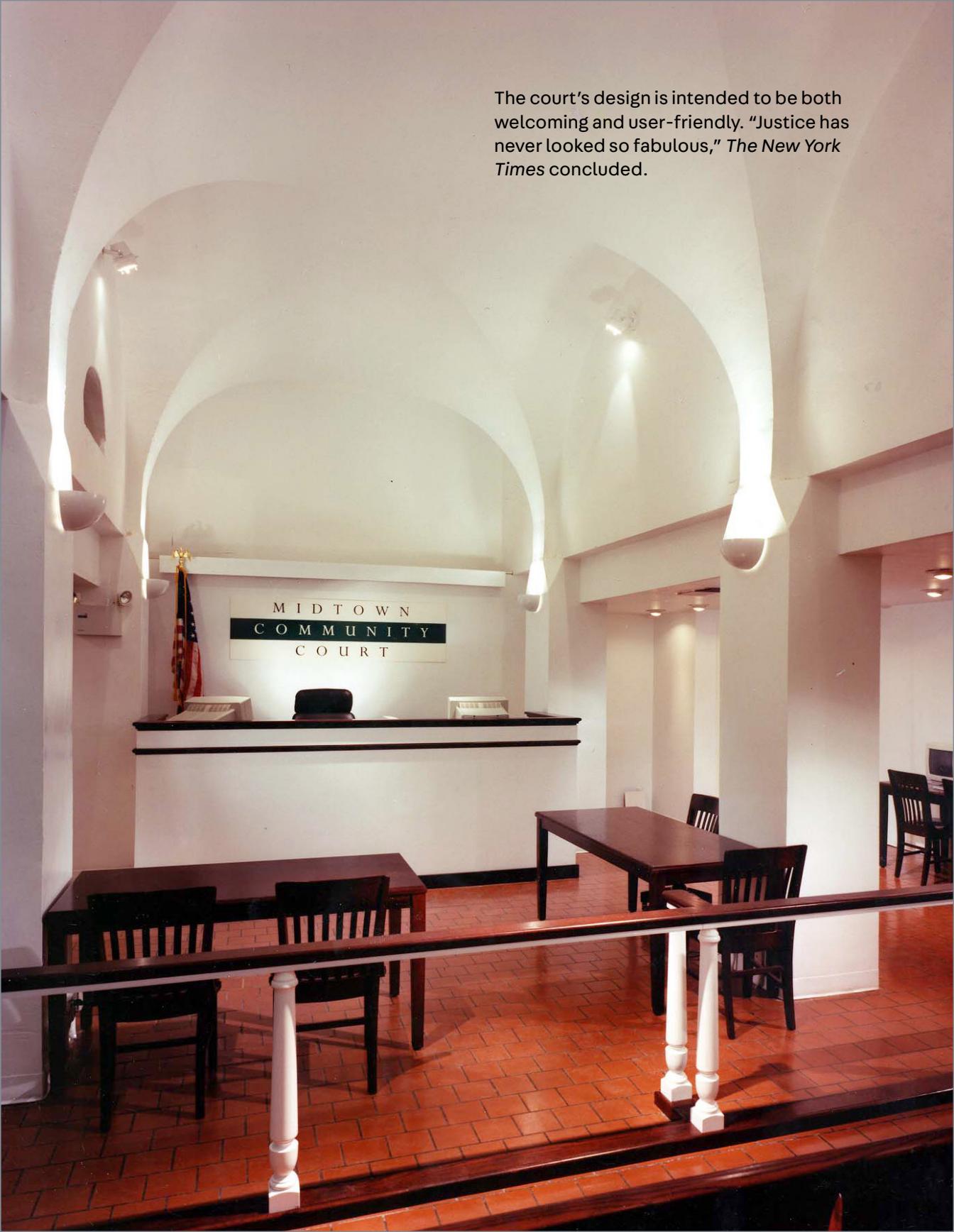


The Midtown Community Court offers new responses to low-level crime, providing restitution to the community and help for individual defendants. When it opened in 1993, a local paper referred darkly to the neighborhood around the court as “a den of crack-dealing and crime.” In response, the Midtown Community Court sought to make justice more meaningful. Instead of fines or jail sentences, defendants performed community service and received on-site social services to address problems like unemployment, addiction, and mental illness. The courthouse was designed to communicate to defendants, victims, and the general public that all who entered the building would be treated with dignity and respect. The impacts of the Midtown Community Court have reverberated across the city and around the world.

Independent evaluators documented that the Midtown Community Court has succeeded in reducing the use of incarceration, improving public safety, and enhancing public trust in justice. The core ideas of the project—providing alternatives to jail, promoting procedural fairness, and engaging the public in doing justice—have spread throughout the American justice system. Today, there are replications both close to home (Red Hook, Harlem) and faraway (Australia, Israel, and many others).

The Midtown Community Court is the product of a unique public-private partnership involving the New York State court system, the Fund for the City of New York, the City of New York, and dozens of government agencies and non-profit groups. One of the court's lasting legacies is that it helped spark the creation of the Center for Court Innovation, winner of numerous national prizes for justice reform.

The court's design is intended to be both welcoming and user-friendly. "Justice has never looked so fabulous," *The New York Times* concluded.



The Midtown Community Court brought justice to a problem area, and the results couldn't be clearer.

– Michael Bloomberg, former New York City Mayor



Community conditions panels are held monthly with residents, business owners, the police, prosecutors, and the defense bar to talk about issues impacting the community.

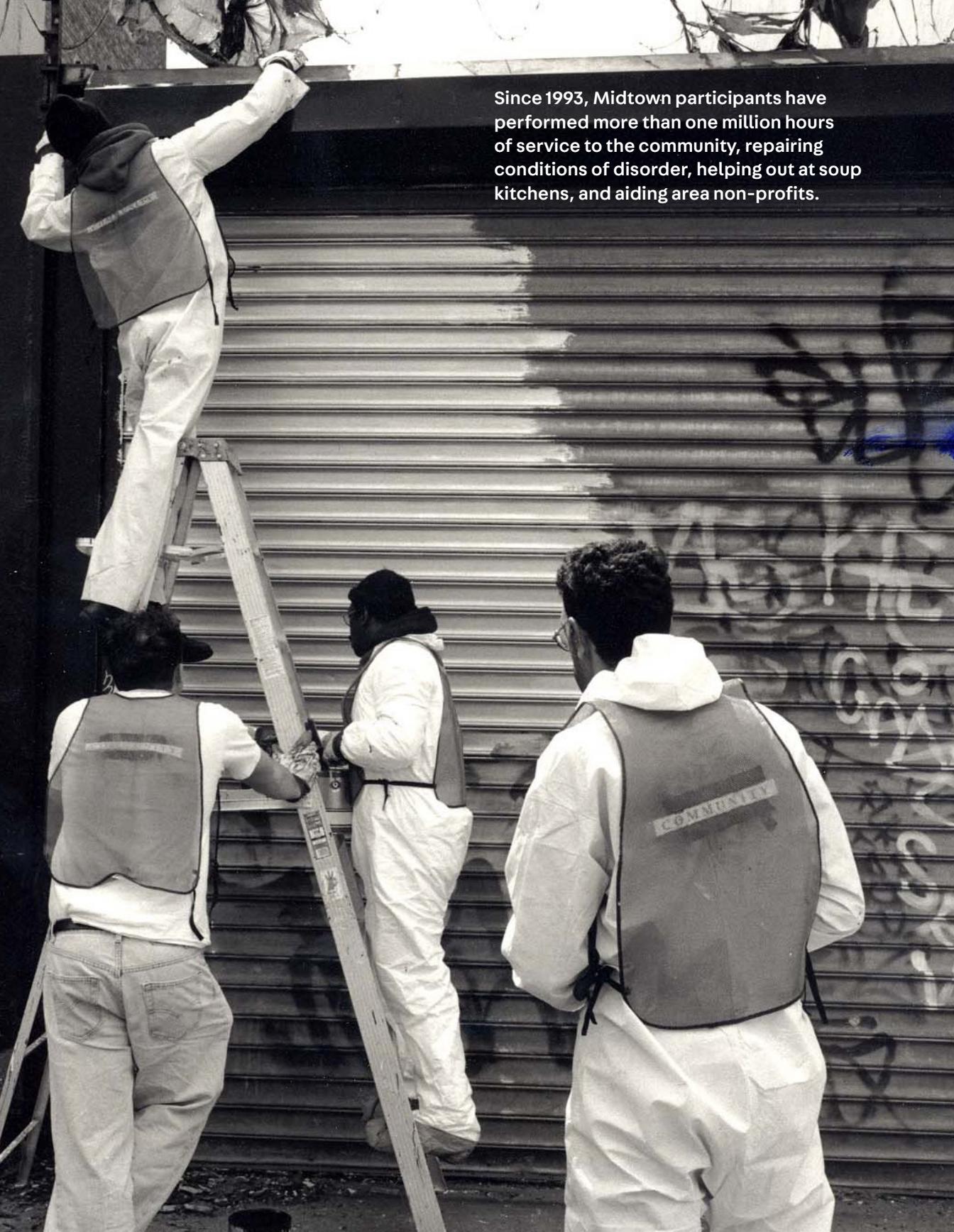
Midtown's cutting-edge technology received top prize at the international Windows World Open for Public Sector Innovation in 1995.

New York magazine featured the Midtown Court in a 1994 story, highlighting the work of the first presiding judge, Judy Harris Kluger.



At Midtown's 10th anniversary: the Hon. Jonathan Lippman, Greg Berman, the Hon. Judith S. Kaye, and Midtown founding director John Feinblatt. According to Feinblatt, the defendants at Midtown "did not have complicated legal cases, but they did have complicated lives."

Since 1993, Midtown participants have performed more than one million hours of service to the community, repairing conditions of disorder, helping out at soup kitchens, and aiding area non-profits.



The secret of the Midtown Community Court's success has always been its ability to attract talented, creative, and compassionate people to the business of reforming the justice system.

— Greg Berman, Center for Court Innovation



Over the years, hundreds of social workers, researchers, administrators, and others have worked at the Midtown Community Court. These include Jeff Hobbs, Amanda Burden, Eric Lee, Michele Sviridoff, and Dida Brassey.

I was always complaining about panhandlers and such, and the mess-up in Times Square, and what can be done about it... I do remember very well saying to Gerry Schoenfeld, the head of the Shubert Organization, "Gerry, you know what? If you give me a theater, I'll give you a court."
— Herb Sturz, Open Society Foundations



Midtown is perhaps the only court in the country to share space with a theater company—the American Theater of Actors. Here, a Midtown client participates in a storytelling event held in partnership with The Moth.



Two of the founding fathers of the Midtown Community Court: the late Robert G.M. Keating and Herb Sturz.

Artwork by human trafficking survivors from the Midtown Court was showcased at the Museum of Modern Art in 2012.



Participants in Midtown's fatherhood program, UPNEXT, tour the Museum of Modern Art.



Midtown works in partnership with numerous local organizations, including The Times Square Alliance, which has helped supervise defendants performing community service and offered transitional employment to Midtown clients.



Each year, the Midtown Community Court handles 15,000 cases, providing justice that is swift, proportionate, and humane.

*This court was totally different. They didn't treat me like a criminal.
It was actually kind of strange.*

— Russell Brown, client



Signage in the courthouse has been designed to promote clarity and make it easy for people to find what they need.



Over the years, Midtown has hosted hundreds of high-ranking officials from around the world. Here, the Lord Chancellor of the United Kingdom gets a view from behind the bench.

*“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.
Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”*
- Martin Luther King Jr.



Midtown’s on-site clinic provides a broad range of services, both for those mandated by the judge and those who come to seek help voluntarily.



Judicial leadership has been crucial to the success of the Midtown Community Court. Having a single judge dedicated to the project ensures consistency and promotes accountability.

When I visited Midtown Community Court, I was really amazed by the programs and the excellent results. People were given real assistance that helped divert them from the criminal justice system, which is exactly what we want.

— Corey Johnson, New York City Council Speaker



314 West 54th Street
New York, NY 10019
courtinnovation.org