CASE STUDY

Bryant Park | New York City

BILCO Door Allows for Critical Egress At Iconic New York Landmark

Millions of people march past a BILCO floor door in midtown Manhattan every year, blissfully unaware of the door's critical safety role and its uniqueness in one of the most creative architectural designs in the venerable city.

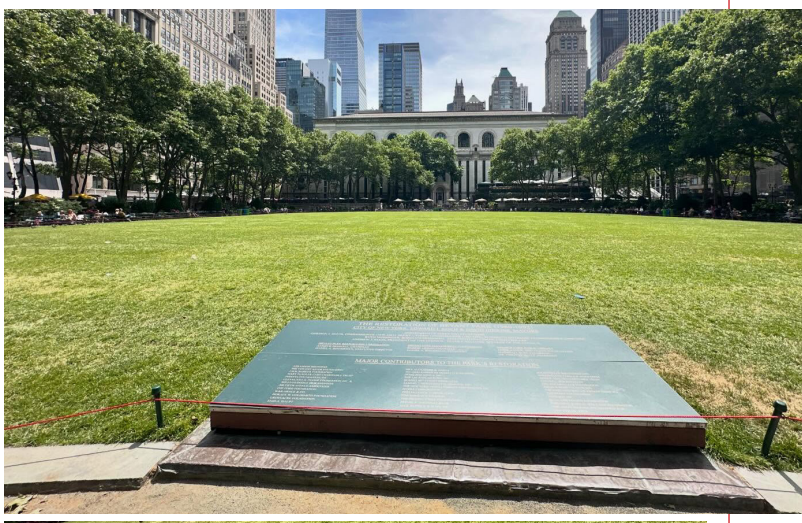
Located in Bryant Park, the BILCO door is installed on the west end of the park, on the edge of the Great Lawn. The door provides emergency egress for workers of the New York Public Library. Under the lawn, the library constructed the Milstein Research Stacks, a two-story underground book bunker with 84 miles of shelving. The bunker allows the library to preserve more than four million books and archival materials underneath the park.

The double-leaf door is plainly visible and was installed during a multi-year renovation project that began in 1983. The renovation coincided with the NYPL's expansion, when it constructed the stacks. The 10-acre park was excavated, and the Great Lawn was built above it. The construction of the stacks forced the delay in the reopening of Bryant Park, which officially re-opened in 1992 after being closed for nearly four years.

The Millstein Research Stacks — 17 feet underground, according to a New York Times article — are connected to the main branch of the library and staff retrieve materials via a book train, which is comprised of 24 red trolleys. The trains transport books and other materials on a mini railroad between the stacks and the circulation desks. The 95-foot railroad can cover 75 feet per minute, requiring about five minutes to reach the circulation desk.

The research area was created to relocate the overflow of books and research materials. The original plan sought to store the research materials in a New Jersey warehouse. That plan, however, upset researchers who feared it would cause delays as they waited for the materials from a facility several miles away.

The rail system was implemented in 2016 in the renovation of the Rose Main Reading Room. The $2.6 million system is easier to maintain and more efficient than the previous conveyor system. The renovation also added a second level to the Millstein Research Stacks, creating capacity for 4.3 million research volumes.



Developed by Gensler Architects and Tishman Construction, the lower level remained unfinished after the Millstein Stacks were opened in 1992. The renovation was made with an $8 million donation from Abby and Howard Milstein, longtime library benefactors.

The Main Branch of the library opened in 1911, and was the largest marble structure at that time in the United States. The Stephen A. Schwarzman building, the centerpiece of the Main Branch, is an iconic landmark known for its architecture and world-renowned research collections.

The BILCO door that provides critical egress for employees working in the Milstein Stacks has been captured in social media posts by some sharp-eyed visitors.

Doors and other products from BILCO are included in many projects that are unbeknownst to many people but often play an important role for access and safety. They are especially renowned for their durability, and the door in Bryant Park has stood the test of time.

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