

Extraordinary Design and Execution Transports Anne Frank and Her Times to New York

BY ERIC UHLFELDER

The transposition is shocking.

From a quiet Chelsea street into the emerging storm that grew into World War II and the Holocaust . . . even when carrying knowledge of what is to come, one can't fully prepare to intimately confront the life and times of Anne Frank at the Center for Jewish History on West 16th Street.

Credit Ronald Leopold and Tom Brink, executive director and head of collections of the Anne Frank House, for bringing this exhibit to New York.

Working closely with Tom to achieve this remarkable effect was Dutch designer Eric Goosens who gave shape to the exhibit on so many dimensions. It starts with an unexpected and clever layout and presentation, lighting and color palette that evolves with pitch-perfect pacing. All of this helps tell the story as much as the wide-ranging content of the exhibition, including the first full-scale replica of the annex in which Anne and her family and colleagues lived for two years.

That content of all different mediums, appearing in all shapes and sizes, includes contemporaneous images and film, furniture, official Nazi orders, personal scraps, images, and artifacts, handwritten poems and notes . . . and a diary. All of this is then seamlessly tied together by succinct audio commentary.

The exhibition leads us through two parallel storylines: the emerging Holocaust and the experiences and spaces occupied by an insightful teenage girl who couldn't have known the full extent of atrocities that were to envelop her family, her religion, and most of Europe, and how far her words would eventually reach.

"When I write I can shake off all my cares. My sorrow disappears, my spirits are revived! But, and that's a big question, will I ever be able to write something great, will I ever become a journalist or a writer? I hope so, oh I hope so very much, because writing allows me to record everything, all my thoughts, ideals and fantasies."



ANNE FRANK AT HER DESK. 1941-04. From the collection of Anne Frank House.



ANNE'S BEDROOM (shared with Fritz Pfeiffer) and her desk and diary. Photo credit: John Halpern.

Echoing the times it documents, the maze-like exhibition is meant to disorient. Laid out chronologically, it twists and turns from lightness into darkness, chocked full of fascinating and increasingly disturbing details.

It starts benignly revealing the Franks' upper middle-class life in Frankfurt. Fearing what Germany was devolving into, Anne's father Otto moved the family to Amsterdam where we follow their lives from 1933 to 1940.

It's at that point where viewers get their last glimpse of natural light through a partially glass-enclosed passage that funnels one into a black box theater, shifting the narrative that had been driven by objects and stills to large multi-walled videos of contemporaneous footage revealing the increasingly oppressive life Jews faced in Amsterdam after Germany invaded in 1940.

Under Nazi rule, Dutch officials set up social and educational restrictions, segregated facilities, meted out punishment and



THE FAMILY LIVING SPACE. Photo credit: John Halpern.

death, required residents to register with the authorities with the location of all Jewish residents mapped out to help with the forced

deportations that were soon to come.

That's when Anne's father, Otto Frank, decided to turn the annex in the building that housed his small business on Prinsengracht 263 into a secret living space on the top floors. When Anne's older sister, Margot, received a deportation notice in 1942, the family went into hiding.

From the theater, the exhibition leads us through a hinged bookcase that swings open into the spaces where the Franks would hide for the next two years, never to venture outside.

Drawing precisely from the Anne Frank House, Amsterdam-based designers Annemiek Swinkels and Willem Claassen carefully reproduced the secret annex. We see small bedrooms adorned with favorite images and artificially backlit windows that realistically convey how curtains and

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OCCUPANTS OF THE ANNEX: Franks, van Pels, and Pfeiffer. Photo credit: John Halpern.

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shades were always drawn to prevent discovery. Also recreated are several living spaces the Franks shared alongside Otto's business partner Herman and his wife Augustine and their son Peter; and a local dentist Fritz Pfeiffer.

We also see the small desk where Anne wrote.

Conveying the sudden shock of arrest in August 1944 and deportation that soon followed, the exhibition throws us immediately into the path of the Holocaust. We enter a glass-floor room under which a map of Europe plots the death camps. Above, the exhibition's path is shaped by various hanging images of sights that are to come, taking us from initial killing fields of open ravines, pits and ghettos, eventually into the concentration camps.

Toward the end of this passage, there's a picture of Anne and her classmates at the Montessori school she attended in Amsterdam that individually depicts the fate of each child.

This most brutal part of the exhibit then gives way to a wider more well-lit space accented with color, conveying relief from what had been. It's here we learn Otto Frank survived Auschwitz.

His return home took three months, crossing Poland to Odessa, a boat to Marseilles,



THE GLASS FLOOR OVER A MASSIVE MAP OF NAZI EUROPE and the Holocaust. Photo credit: John Halpern.

then a train ride home through France and to Amsterdam. We learn of kindness shown to many survivors along the way.

Once back in the Netherlands, returning Jews were coolly received, as if an unpleasant reminder of what had been. And we learn one of the most shocking statistics: of the 107,000 Jews that had lived in the country before the war, only 5,000 survived. Among the tens of thousands who didn't were Otto's wife Edith and their children.

Throughout, the exhibition brought this viewer many revelations.

Otto Frank applied for US immigration visas in 1938 at the American consulate in Rotterdam. But his application documents were never processed, destroyed when Germany bombed the city in May 1940.

Anne and Margot nearly survived Bergen-Belsen, dying of typhus just weeks before the camp was liberated in April 1945.

Anne's diary could easily have been lost—first by the authorities when they ransacked the annex after the family's arrest and then by Miep Gies, one of many who worked for Otto and fed the families at great personal

risk. She admits never having read the diary before giving it to Otto upon his return from Auschwitz. But if she had, Gies said she would have destroyed it because it counted all those complicit in hiding Jews.

We learn Otto only truly began to understand his daughter after having read her diary.

We learn the diary was originally rejected by a Dutch publisher and by the venerable New York publisher Viking Press. But it would eventually become translated into more than 70 languages (most on display) with a print run of 30 million. And Anne's story was adapted for the theater, becoming a Pulitzer and Tony Award winning Broadway play and a feature film.

The exhibition concludes with Otto's final thoughts about the book. Today, with nations again resorting to war more frequently as our politics and diplomacy fail, Frank's words are even more relevant for world leaders to hear than they were 65 years ago when he wrote them.

"Anne's diary gave me new strength to fight for reconciliation and for human rights across the world."

The exhibition runs through October 31st at the Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16th Street, www.cjh.org

Dylan Thomas at the White Horse Tavern

BY ROGER PARADISO

White Horse Tavern • 567 Hudson Street

A few years ago the White Horse Tavern was for sale. Villagers were on notice that they were in danger of losing this historic tavern which was home base for many artists and now-old Villagers in the 50s and 60s.

Dylan Thomas hung out at the White Horse in the early 50s. The Welsh poet was best known for the poem *Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night* and a radio play *Under Milk Wood*.

People who hung out with Thomas were celebrities of the day, mostly writers like Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, James Baldwin and Norman Mailer. It was rumored that Mailer and his future partners discussed the formation of the *Village Voice* there. Musicians also liked the vibes at the White Horse. The Clancy Brothers came often as did Jim Morrison from the Doors as well as Bob Dylan. In his book *Chronicles*, Dylan explained that he was inspired to change his name after he saw an article about jazz performer David Allyn and poems by Thomas.

Thomas was a giant in the writing world and still is to this day. His death is still a mystery. Legend has it that one particular night he was drinking with friends at the White Horse, his favorite tavern. He left because he felt ill and was mugged walking back to the Chelsea Hotel. Others say he returned to the Chelsea, where he became ill and was brought to St. Vincent's Hospital where he died a few days later on November

*"Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light."
- Dylan Thomas*



WHITE HORSE TAVERN (above, circa 1961) is the second oldest bar in Manhattan and a well-known hang out spot for author Dylan Thomas, among many others. Credit: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection. Photo by Phyllis Twachtman.

9, 1953. Thomas died of pneumonia, a fatty liver and swelling of the brain according to the autopsy.

His memorial service was held at Church of St Luke's in the Field at the corner of Hudson and Grove streets. His funeral took place two weeks later in Wales. Thomas is buried in the graveyard of St Martin's Church, his grave marked by a simple white cross.

As for the White Horse Tavern today, we all pray and hope there is never an Irish wake for this historic tavern. The new owner, Eytan Sugarman, has restored the famous bar which opened in 1880, the second oldest bar in Manhattan. (The Fraunces Tavern in the Wall Street area opened in 1762.)

Sugarman has changed the menu which is more fashioned after the current crop of gentrified students and hipsters from Wall Street and Bleecker Street. It still serves a burger, but now you get a salad with it. I'm sure even the writers and longshoremen of Thomas' day would eat a salad. It was a rough neighborhood back then as the Village piers brought in goods from around the world. And to be sure there were a lot of exports too. The salt of the earth worked and lived there and they made it the Village we are fond of today. Raise a glass to the past and a smile for these gentrified days.

The White Horse Tavern has always remained a tourist attraction and a haven for workers and artists. And there always will be a few of those around, we hope.