



KEY WEST CUSTOMS HOUSE

KEY WEST, FLORIDA

Restoration Architect:

Bender & Associates, Key West, FL

Restoration Contractor:

Specialized Property Services, Tampa, FL

Stone Restoration Subcontractor:

Nelson Architectural Restoration,
West Willington, CT

Photos courtesy Michael Edison and Randall Nelson, ©2018

[From the Key West Art & Historical Society web site:](#)

Towering over Mallory's historic seaport, the Custom House is as stunning a sight to visitors today as it was when it opened in 1891

Originally home to the island's customs office, postal service, and district courts, this four-story architectural marvel was built to keep pace with the increasing population and wealth accumulating from Key West's lucrative trade routes and maritime industries. The imposing structure is a tremendous exemplar of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture which was typical for Federal building projects near the end of the 19th century.

Positioned adjacent to the U.S. Naval base, the Custom House was the site of many significant historical events, most notably the inquiry into the sinking of the USS *Maine* in Havana harbor in 1898.

In 1932, the building transferred to the U.S. Navy and became headquarters for their Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico operations. When the Navy no longer required use of the building, it was declared surplus and abandoned for nearly twenty years. The Custom House was eventually purchased by the State of Florida's Land Acquisition Advisory Council in 1991 and leased to the [Key West Art & Historical Society](#) for use as a museum.

Today, “Old 91” has been faithfully restored and stands on the harbor as a national landmark, an award-winning museum and official headquarters of the Key West Art & Historical Society. Experience two floors of exhibitions that weave together two centuries of history, art, people, and events.



In 1993, Edison Coatings produced Custom System 45 Type SD red sandstone repair mortar to match the existing sandstone on this Key West landmark. Stone repairs were performed by Randall Nelson of Nelson Architectural Restoration, West Willington, CT. Twenty five years later, Nelson remains proud of the durability and quality of his 1993 work, and was engaged for a new round of repairs to the building’s rapidly weathering sandstone.

Using a combination of new stone and [Custom System 45 Type SD](#) sandstone repair mortars, Nelson has been expertly restoring lost details. The work is an enduring tribute to Nelson’s stone-carving skills and artistry.

These photos are examples of the artist’s 2018 work, taken while in progress.

1. 25 years after his initial work was completed, Nelson remains proud of the quality and durability of his work.



2. Sandstone column, before repair



3. Column base, before repair



4. Column capital repair, in progress



5. Column base repair, in progress



6. Completed column repair