One hundred and eighteen years after construction was completed on Illinois’ sixth state Capitol, the House and Senate chambers have been restored to resemble the plush style envisioned by architects John Cochrane of Chicago and Alfred Piquenard of France.

Since last spring, hundreds of specialized workers have toiled around the clock to restore history. At the same time, they upgraded the heating and air conditioning system, fire safety features, Internet capabilities and wheelchair accessibility.

In the process, they discovered ornate details that had disappeared beneath layers of paint. Throughout both chambers, some committee rooms and the rotunda, artists from New York-based EverGreene Painting Studios uncovered original murals. They compared the images to black-and-white photographs of the time and analyzed chips of paint to find the original colors. Then they assembled the puzzle to recreate the late 1800’s style.

The public’s first glimpse of the transformation is in the first floor rotunda, where many visitors snap pictures of the kaleidoscopic dome. In seven months, the rotunda ceiling was transformed from a cream-colored circle to vaulted panels of vibrant murals.

Three floors up, the House and Senate chambers now have rust-colored, hand-sewn carpet, new and refinished wood paneling, new desks and gold-trimmed ceilings.

Senate construction wrapped up in time for the chamber to be used in January. The House renovation required removing asbestos and upgrading the heating and air conditioning. That chamber is expected to be ready the first week in February.

Coordinating and overseeing the entire project was Donald McLarty, architect of the Capitol, and co-chairs of the Office of the Architect, Tim Mapes and Linda Hawker. Mapes is chief of staff for House Speaker Michael Madigan. Hawker is the retired secretary of the Senate.

The House chamber, seen in the middle of renovation last November, is expected to be unveiled in early February.

A mural on the ceiling of a first-floor committee room is painted in sky blue, white and gold to make it look like a Victorian skylight.

Tim Mapes, chief of staff for House Speaker Michael Madigan, views the renovations from the scaffolding used to install a new antique lay light in the ceiling.

The first-floor ceiling in the archways that lead to the center of the rotunda was transformed from solid cream panels to decorative murals.
Artists chipped away layers of paint in the rotunda ceiling so they could see patterns and analyze the colors used in the original murals.

The finished product uses shades of green, blue, rose and peach that match the marble throughout the Capitol.

Rehabilitation of the Senate was completed by January. Rust-colored, hand-sewn carpet and roll-down desks are new. The majority of the wood in the chamber is refinished mahogany.