



Hawaii Theatre Center revived in Honolulu.

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After spending the past decade restoring the circa-1922 Hawaii Theatre Center in Honolulu, architect Malcolm Holzman is quick to admit that it's one of the longest projects ever to remain on the boards--year after year after year--at his New York practice, Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates. But, as design maven Martha Stewart might say about the thorough yet lengthy timetable, "It's a good thing."

"Too frequently, designers and architects don't have sufficient patience to stay with a project in terms of the minute details," says Holzman, FAIA. "Time was actually an advantage in this case. Often it's helpful to come back to a piece of work over time and get everything right before you move on or call the job complete. We wanted this space to have a healthy public life well into the next century."

Reopened in May after the \$21-million restoration, the Beaux Arts theatre is once again being referred to by the local press and community as "the Pride of the Pacific." Helmed by HHPA principal Holzman, the project has restored the venue's ornate interior--respecting the building's historic past--while upgrading the theatrical systems and service amenities. The project team also included New York City-based acoustic and theatre consultant Peter George Associates, Honolulu liaison architect Daniel Mann Johnson & Mendenhall (a practice now disbanded), and theatrical lighting consultant Norman Russell Design.

Originally designed by Emory & Webb architects of San Francisco as a vaudeville house, the 1,400-seat theatre served as a showplace for touring acts, plays, and musicals, then eventually evolved into a movie palace after World War II. The only remaining classical auditorium in downtown Honolulu, the Hawaii is listed on both the National and State Registers of Historic Places. The revitalization of the venue is part of the redevelopment of Honolulu's historic Chinatown district, and represents the first phase of an HHPA master plan for the theatre center that will occupy additional space on the remainder of the downtown city block for public and support facilities.

"This is really a gem of a space that has been refurbished as the centerpiece of the district's redevelopment," Holzman says. "There has been massive new construction over the years along the hotel strip of beach in Honolulu, while the downtown district has almost been the land that time forgot. This theatre had been virtually abandoned for 10 years and was going to be demolished, as have other Hawaii structures in the area. It was pivotal to the larger development plan to save the Hawaii Theatre."

The restoration project first got off the ground when a private citizen stepped in with approximately \$500,000 to purchase and save the building, Holzman notes. Over the years, the plan became partially bankrolled with public funds. Mary Bishop, a preservationist and theatre consultant who had earlier worked with Holzman to revive the Ohio Theatre in Columbus, was brought into the Hawaii project as a project manager of sorts, and in turn recommended HHPA. "There was this feeling in the community that the building had to be saved," Holzman says, "but no one knew exactly who would use it or how it would prosper." The theatre's restoration committee decided upon a plan that would allow the theatre to serve multiple uses. The broad configuration of the auditorium, with its large balcony and unusually shaped seating configuration (the audience chamber is wider than it is deep) classifies the Hawaii as an "intimate" mid-sized theatre suitable for musical presentations, theatre, dance, concerts, festivals, and films. "There's a terrific compaction between the proscenium and your seat that makes for a very close relationship between audience and performer," Holzman says.

Due to years of neglect and the ravages of termites, humidity, and water leakage, much of the auditorium's decor was damaged beyond repair. An art conservation program encompassed cleaning, patching, and painting canvases and ornamental plaster. Lionel Walden's mural, *The Glorification of the Drama*, decorates the top of the proscenium and has been exquisitely restored by Conrad Schmitt Studios, including the recreation of a major portion of the work--at least 35'--that had been destroyed. Patterns of original linen seat cushions have been translated into the design of new seating fabrics and lobby carpeting. The original, ornate Robert Morton organ has been multiplexed and returned to form by Harger and Jackson. Audience area improvements include wider seats--down to 1,400 from the original 1,700--and improved sightlines and acoustics. A new parterre section framing the orchestra seating accommodates the handicapped and makes for a more graceful seating scheme.

Going beyond the features of the original building, the new theatre incorporates an enlarged stage area, an expanded orchestra pit with hydraulic lift, new dressing rooms, a large banquet room with catering kitchen, and new lighting, sound, and projection systems. A Strand Lightpalette and ellipsoidal reflectors, two followspots, three company switch panels, and two light booms plus a balcony lighting rail are part of the lighting package.

The theatrical systems are specifically designed for multi-use. The pit accommodates 35 to 40 musicians and has a hydraulic lift, while the rigging is a compound T-bar counterweight system with a complement of house curtain, legs, teasers, scrims, and a cyclorama. The stage measures 31' by 41'4" with a grid height of 60'. The relatively tight wing spaces are 13' (right) and 24' (left) wide. A dance floor with neoprene panels, slide and video projection capabilities, and a cinema screen enhance the theatre.

Local performing-arts, civic, and professional organizations and educational institutions will account for the majority of Hawaii Theatre Center bookings, with professional promoters, mainland producers, and HTC presentations filling out the schedule.

Future expansions planned for the Hawaii include enlarged lobbies, a grand stair, an elevator to the balcony, a function room, rehearsal rooms, administrative offices, and concessions to serve growing audiences. Holzman also hopes to complete a restoration of the facade, including a new marquee, within the next year.

Since its inception in 1967, HHPA has designed and built more than 50 buildings for the arts. In addition to the Hawaii Theatre Center, HHPA currently is completing the renovation of the historic New Amsterdam Theatre on New York's 42nd Street, slated to open in the 1997-98 season as a Disney theatrical showplace.

"Of all the projects I've worked on, I have a warm spot in my heart for the Hawaii Theatre," Holzman says. "All of the members of the restoration team have spent the last decade getting the details right. It's wonderful to see the venue filled with performance again."

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