



CASE STUDY

Liberty Theater | Lawrenceburg, Indiana

Indiana Project Restores Musical Roots For Long-Abandoned Theater

History beckoned a long-time Indiana music promoter to restore a venue more than 130 years old to its roots. A two-year, \$4.75 million renovation met that objective while also adding additional spaces in which the community can enjoy and unwind.

Liberty Theater in Lawrenceburg, Indiana, was originally built in 1893 by German immigrants who established the Lawrenceburg Liedertafel, which kept the community's old-world traditions alive with music, singing and beer. Prohibition and the development of motion pictures caused a name change and the switch to visual entertainment.

Building owner Dan McCabe, working with architects from Drawing Dept, reimagined the 13,455 square-foot building and created a 450-person concert venue, whiskey bar and dining area.

McCabe's overarching objective sought authenticity. Every material choice looked to honor the building's legacy while also delivering the functionality needed for a contemporary music venue.

"Authenticity was the north star," McCabe explained. "I didn't want to stamp something onto the room or onto the building. I wanted to restore and preserve wherever we could. We took original elements and kept them as frequently as we could."

Elements that harken back to the building's roots include clerestory windows, which are designed to flood interiors with natural light. Along with an open ceiling, the design creates an airy, light-filled atmosphere. The arched entrance vestibule includes the building's original ticket booth, and the path from the vestibule through the lobby features a Victorian tile pattern that is similar to what designers featured in the late 1800s. The wood roof, old growth wood flooring and cast-iron and metal façade work are other elements that are part of the building's unique heritage.

Architects and construction teams also faced the additional challenge of creating space for mechanical equipment and fixtures that were not included in the original building. Architects could not even determine if the original building included bathrooms.

Drawing Dept's design team also placed a priority on specifying mechanical equipment and components that deliver longevity and critical functionality. One of those features was a roof hatch manufactured by BILCO that allows access to equipment for repair and



replacement. BILCO's Bil-Guard® 2.0 Roof Hatch Safety Railing System was also included in the project, providing a permanent means of fall protection from the roof opening.

"BILCO is widely recognized when it comes to access equipment," Kevin Kluender, lead architect for Drawing Dept, said. "We get great service and great representation in terms of buying them and procuring them. We never had a reason to look at anybody else."

BILCO's roof hatches offer easy, one-hand operation to a fully open or closed position. They include an automatic hold-open arm that locks the cover in the 70-degree open position to ensure safe egress. The Bil-Guard® 2.0 system provides a permanent means of fall protection for roof hatch openings, and models are available for most roof hatch and automatic fire vent sizes.

The Liberty Theater project received recognition including the Cincinnati Preservation Excellence Award and a Merit Award from the AIA Cincinnati.



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