

ARCHITECTURE

MN

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An historic office building rises again

COVER: RENAISSANCE SQUARE
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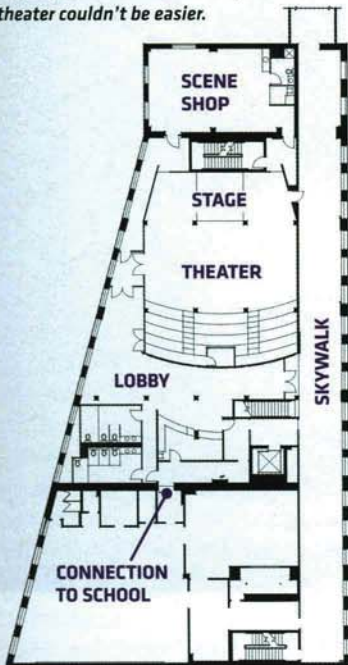
The spacious lobby (below left and opposite), with its music stage and service window, is a classroom by day and a student coffeeshop on Friday evenings, hosting diverse performers. Its curving maple-clad wall is furnished with an art-hanging system for student exhibitions.



ACT TWO

BY ANN KLEFSTAD

Skyway access to the second-floor theater couldn't be easier.



Duluth's celebrated Harbor City International School adds a professional-quality performance space to its warehouse digs

Ghanaian drumming sometimes filters down the skywalk in Duluth, and if you follow the sound you'll discover young voices singing, dancers learning their art, or perhaps a rehearsal of a scene from Shakespeare. In the heart of the Duluth Plumbing Supply building on Michigan Street in downtown Duluth, an old boxing gym has become a new theater for Harbor City International School.

The charter school, which has occupied the third and fourth floors of the 1894 warehouse for seven years, received a half-million-dollar federal grant

for charter-school facility enhancement to develop a theater for its students. With the help of architect Bill Scalzo, who designed the award-winning original buildout of the school, and Doug Zaun, AIA, of Wagner Zaun Architecture, the school did that and more. The redeveloped second floor of the old warehouse has become a theater, a movement studio, a scene shop, an art gallery, and a lobby with a music stage and an espresso bar for the students' coffeeshop performances. And it's all classroom space.

The beautiful heavy timbering and cast-iron columns, along with the stone and brick walls, have been retained, and Zaun's elegantly spare and useful spaces are deftly inserted into the century-old matrix. The theater, which the school makes available to outside groups, has its own entrance on Duluth's downtown skywalk system to enable easy audience access.



The black-box theater (left) has so far been transformed into a Shakespearean forest and a tenement sweatshop.

HARBOR CITY INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL THEATER

Location:
Duluth, Minnesota

Client:
Harbor City International School

Architects:
Scalzo Architects
scalzoarchitects.com
Wagner Zaun Architecture
www.wagnerzaun.com

Principal-in-charge:
William Scalzo, Scalzo Architects

Project lead designer:
Doug Zaun, AIA,
Wagner Zaun Architecture

Energy modeling:
Conservation Technologies

General contractor:
Don Holm Construction

Size:
8,000 square feet

Cost:
\$600,000

Completion date:
June 2008

Photographer:
Aaron M. Molina



The theater is a training ground for students in all aspects of drama, music, dance, and art—even the managerial ones. Faculty “hire” students for all of the positions demanded by a professional venue. For the school’s first production, Molière’s *Tartuffe*, in spring 2008, students designed and built the sets, created the costumes, designed the lighting and sound, and even contributed to the development and direction of the play.

“The idea really started when we saw what kind of students were selecting Harbor City: Fifty percent are involved in the arts in one way or another,” notes school founder Chris Hazelton. “We thought we could take it to another level with a professional space for performance.”

Hazelton’s decision to locate the school in a downtown warehouse was deliberate, says Zaun. “The design of the theater reflects that,” he

continues. “The heavy timbers and columns were retained, and the theater was placed within the 1894 shell, instead of obscuring it.”

Zaun describes the 160-seat performance space as “a neutral black box. The curved back theater wall takes its contour from the seating, shaping the lobby space. You sense the performance space from the lobby; the curve is the performance space as 800-pound gorilla.” Visitors encounter the polished-maple curve on their right as they enter the large lobby, and it leads them to the theater doors.

Scalzo calls the theater “an evolution of what we’d done before in the building. The guiding spirit was to keep it kind of raw, with simple, durable finishes.”

Wagner Zaun and Scalzo Architects brought in acoustical planners to ensure that the space would

work as well for actors as it would for rock bands. Professional light and sound were built in. The theater also has its own IP address and is fully wired for online use; thanks to a projector, a big screen that descends to the stage, and the videophone capabilities of Skype, students can interact in real time with a presenter or actor halfway around the world.

This beautiful, hardworking space is shaping the future of the school. Look for growing interest in the productions that find a home here, as well as in the educational model that weaves schooling into the cultural life of a reviving downtown. **AMN**