

DESIGN

JOHN SERGIO FISHER

Grand designs

Redevelopment of an existing theater and its entry space has brought a historic venue up-to-date

The Grand Sierra Resort is located in the heart of Reno, Nevada, USA. Offering nearly 2,000 guest rooms and suites, the resort is a popular tourist destination. The Grand Sierra Resort also offers 200,000ft² of meeting and convention space, and hosts top-name entertainment events in the resort's distinguished Grand Theatre.

The theater has a rich history and has become famed for its stage productions. In mid-August, 2015, for a Billy Idol concert, the venue opened the doors of an expanded, newly renovated and updated Grand Theatre. Elements of the sentimental value and class of the venue have been preserved, but the renovated theater was updated with new sound and lighting systems intended to give the audience the best audio and visual experience possible. Visitors to the beautiful new theater were treated to an elevated audio and comfortable viewing experience, showcased in that night's performance and those that followed.

The Grand Theatre is located in the former MGM Hotel and Casino. When it opened in 1978, it contained a dinner theater that accommodated 1,800 guests and the largest stage in the world, complete with flies and stage lifts. Nowadays, dinner theater is not popular or economically viable, so the resort operators wanted to change the theater to a flexible performance venue with fixed seating for 2,700 and with the ability to have standing room for rock concerts, increasing the capacity to more than 3,000.

In light of these requirements, the new design channeled the spirit of the arts and created a functional space that elevated the experience of all performances held thereafter. The deep red

and cherry wood color combination throughout the theater and lobby create harmony and warmth within the scene, while highlighting the nostalgic appeal the theater has acquired over the years. The new design also incorporates luxurious floor-to-ceiling glass walls, creating a visually pleasing and modern lobby that does not interrupt the flow and functionality of the space.

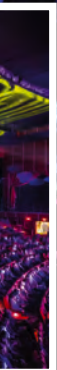


Seeing clearly

When approaching the theater from the casino floor there is an open box office before the enclosed lobby with LED displays of the events. The lobby is completely enclosed with frameless glazing. Even the required fire exit stairway adjacent to the lobby is enclosed with fire-rated glass to maximize the openness of the entry.

The new entry defines the new theater. It is level with the casino floor and the cross-aisle for ease of access to wheelchair positions off the cross-aisle. The new theater lobby extends through the pervasive casino ceiling to create a two-story lobby space. The new lobby has a frameless glazing system with stainless-steel spider and glass fins, and features an 11ft-wide curving





Main: The theater configured for to host a rock concert event, with additional LED screens

Inset: The theater's cross-aisle and parterre seating sections

Far left: The standing room section with wagons removed

Bottom left: The theater lower lobby area with grand staircase

Bottom right: The entry and box office from the casino floor

DESIGN

All images: Ciro Coelho



Clockwise from above: The theater with the original main curtain deployed; the seat wagons in place; the parterre section, cross-aisle VIP and removable orchestra wagons

grand staircase. The staircase and elevator provide access to the rear of the parterre seating and wheelchair positions at the back row.

The original theater floor and entry was gutted and a new design was implemented – it has three equal banks of comfortable continental seating, with the parterre section above the cross-aisle. The orchestra section has booths and VIP seating as far as the midpoint, where there's a railing and a drop to a flat floor for a standing audience. When this floor is not used for rock concerts, there are three banks of wagons that continue the flow of seating from above, down to the stage. The orchestra seating wagons are on casters and are rolled to the large stage lifts and stored below the stage when rock concerts are held.

Expansion plans

The original audience chamber footprint could not accommodate the desired capacity. The width of the chamber could not be easily expanded, as it was constrained by emergency stairways. However, it was possible to demolish existing steel girders to eat into the large stage and expand the orchestra seating area up to the first stage lift. It was also possible to extend the parterre seating to an upper lobby level. The distance from the stage edge to the last row in the parterre is 140ft, which exceeds recommended distances but is mitigated by two large LED screens, situated stage left and stage right, high up at the proscenium opening. The distance has not discouraged audiences from attending packed houses since the renovation. The audience

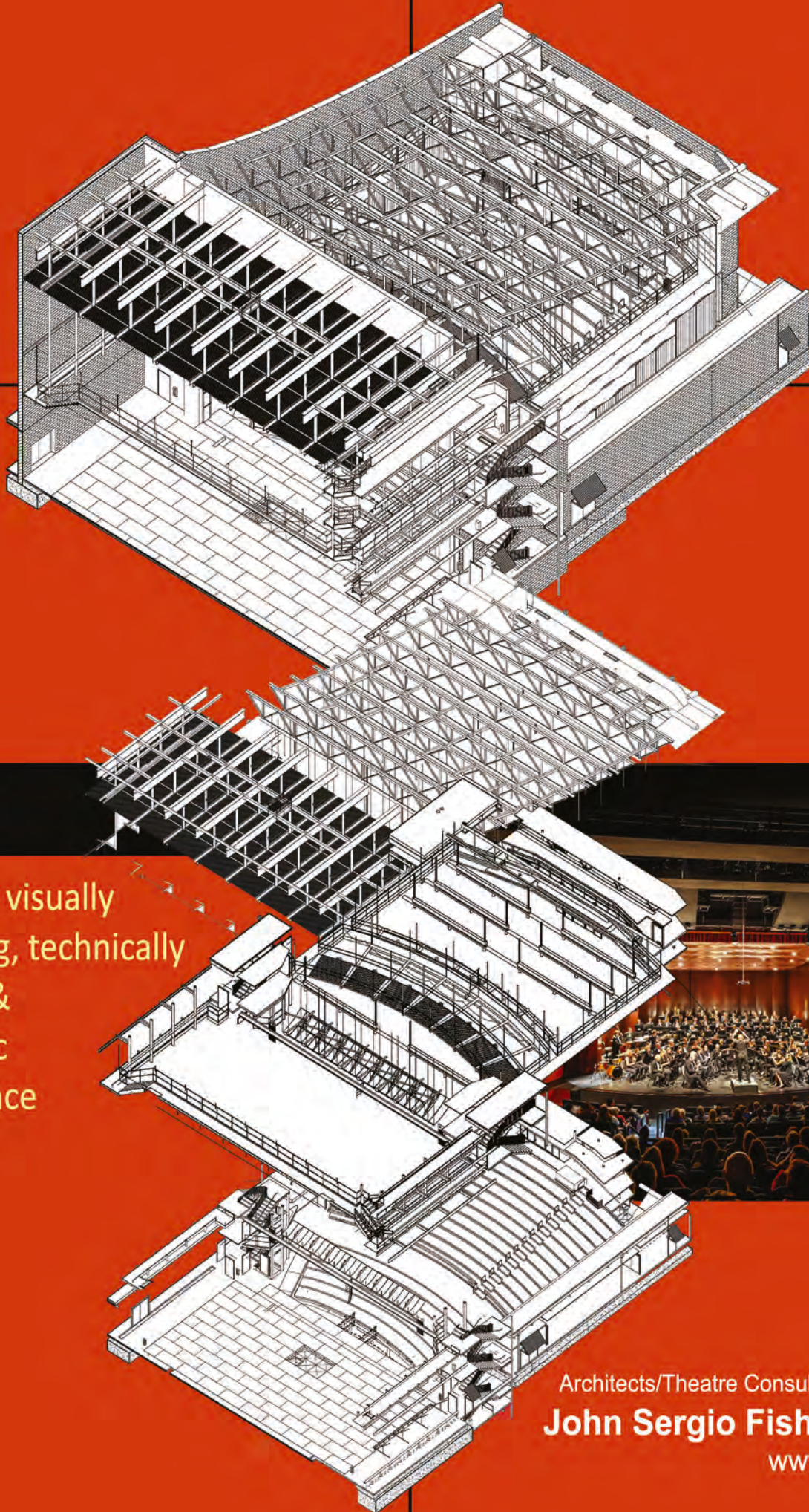
reaction to the transformed theater has been enthusiastic, praising the venue for its ambience, sightlines, functionality and improved acoustics.

The theater renovation has altered the venue acoustics, creating a crisper, more intelligible sound. The existing sound system was not modified. The sidewalls, with cherry wood paneling, are reflective – as opposed to the previous drapery, which muffled the space. The correction, which achieves the desired reverberation time, was made by installing new fabric-covered fiberglass absorption panels on the rear walls, up above and surrounding the control room.

The atmosphere inside the new venue has been transformed from 1970s casino to a warm performing arts center. Those who have been attending the venue since its opening will note nostalgic nods to the theater's past – the main drape and its valance, and the drapes that define the side boxes. The renovation also included new performing artists' facilities, dressing rooms and green rooms.

The project architect, theatre consultant and acoustical consultant is John Sergio Fisher & Associates of Los Angeles and San Francisco. The structural engineer was BJG of Reno, the orchestra seating wagons were designed by the resort's director of entertainment, Chris Christiansen, and the general contractors and owners' representatives were Victor Rios and Bobby Ouellette. ■

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