

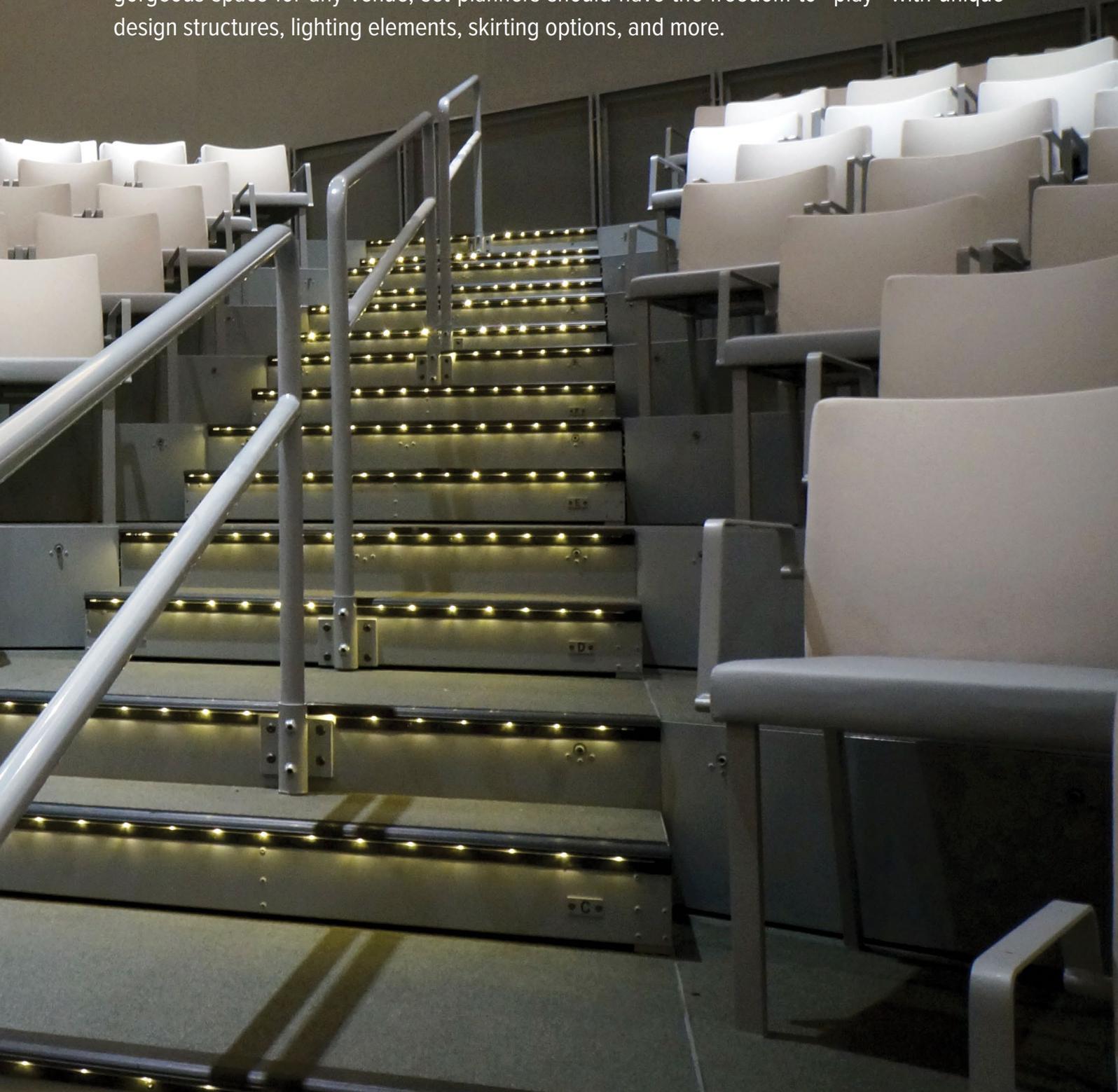
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Dressing Up the Stage

by Chelsea Johnson

When adjusting a venue or stage for a performance, some key factors to incorporate are the theater's acoustical, structural and functional aspects. Apart from the larger structural improvements or additions, there are many different ways to dress up a stage. To create a gorgeous space for any venue, set planners should have the freedom to “play” with unique design structures, lighting elements, skirting options, and more.



Skirting, which is typically the first choice for dressing up a performance stage, provides a classic appearance that serves a functional purpose (concealing the supports) and adding style. Skirting provides a nice finishing touch for any space.

Stage Skirting Clips or LED Lighting

For show choirs and traveling performers, stage skirting clips are a perfect solution. The skirting is easily removable and storable, making for a quick and easy set-up of a portable performance stage. Skirt clips can either be removed or simply left in place when platforms are stored. Usually, all skirting is custom-made and is fit specifically to each performance stage. Standard skirting is black wyndham material with 50% pleat fullness, but other options are also available from a variety of industry leaders. Skirting is a perfect solution to dress up a stage for any type of performance or venue.

If you decide not to include skirting, LED lighting can be a great tool to enhance the stage look. By arranging colored or strobe lights underneath the platforms, aluminum legs can serve as a reflector, adding flair and the illusion of motion under the stage to fantastic effect.

When a more intricate, flexible design is required, there are opportunities to mix things up a bit. Custom finishes, materials and a tight fitting stage system can really differentiate a space, as was the case with the San Francisco Opera.

Reviving a Historic Space

In February 2016, the San Francisco Opera opened the new Diane B. Wilsey Center for the Opera. The Center was part of a 40,000 square foot renovation to the 1930s-era Veterans Building, located just north of the 3,146 seat Opera House. The 299-seat Taube Atrium Theatre is located on the 4th Floor of the Wilsey Center, and was previously occupied by the Museum of Modern Art. The idea for the space was to be both intimate and flexible, yet somewhat informal. They wanted a space that would offer the ability to push performance boundaries, inspire a new generation of audiences, and be relevant for decades into the future.

The list of challenges was long. The Opera needed the equipment and technology to make the space flexible for the experimental performance styles and acoustical techniques that future performances might dream up. They also needed to modify the historic

fourth-floor space to handle the weight loads of an audience, and have the ability to control the lighting and acoustics for professional performances.

One of the most important elements considered was the ability to manipulate the audience configurations and sight lines. Based in Minnesota, Staging Concepts was selected to build flexible audience risers and stages that would meet two primary configurations, but would allow for many variations, with every design detail, material, and finish meticulously considered.

The understructure of the risers are powder-coated black to disappear in the darkness, and are also closed off with custom steel mesh closure panels. The panels transition seamlessly into custom raker guardrail engineered to meet the loading criteria of the International Building Code, but can also be installed quickly using a minimalist design by allowing the rail to lock directly into the platform frames.

The closure panels, guardrail, handrail, platform frames, and stairs are all powder-coated gray to blend into the gray walls of the performance space. The custom gray carpet was selected to match the room aesthetics as well as dampen performance reverberation

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Staging accessories like powder-coating, skirting, and unique surfaces can create a disappearing affect to the set, directing the audience's attention to the performance. Even in smaller venues such as high school auditoriums, college performance halls or public spaces, much can be done to dress up the stage in a functionally multipurpose space.

and footfall. The carpet is two-toned with black accents to ensure audience members can see stair edges at egress. LED lighting was integrated into step units to mark aisle-ways.

Although this project was an extreme example of customizing a space to create a beautiful layout, the smaller, made-to-order aspects of this space were what made the performances light up.

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Options for Customization

For a semi-permanent stage or seating riser system, a closure panel is a great choice. Closure panels are made of rigid materials such as aluminum, solid hardwood or veneer, and can even be made to match the top surface decking material. Closure panels are much sturdier than skirting and provide a more permanent look; however they are also heavier to install, which means they are a better choice for a semi-permanent system.

Similar to attaching a stage skirt, closure panels are clipped to the side of the aluminum extrusion using the same built-in clip system. Closure panels can be easily removed with a simple T-handle tool for tear-down or for accessing space underneath a stage. Closure panels can be highly customized to match any area of a performance space. For example, if there is hardwood seating or ornamental trim in a performance space, you can source solid hardwood or hardwood veneer and match both stain and finish to yield a consistent look within a space.

On the Surface

Surfaces of platforms on stage are also extremely important both functionally for the performers and aesthetically for design reasons. The platform system chosen for this project consists of an aluminum extrusion frame with a top decking material and aluminum legs as standard. The top decking is mostly seen and used by performers, hence the top decking should suit their needs, however the sides of the platforms are typically seen head-on from an audience



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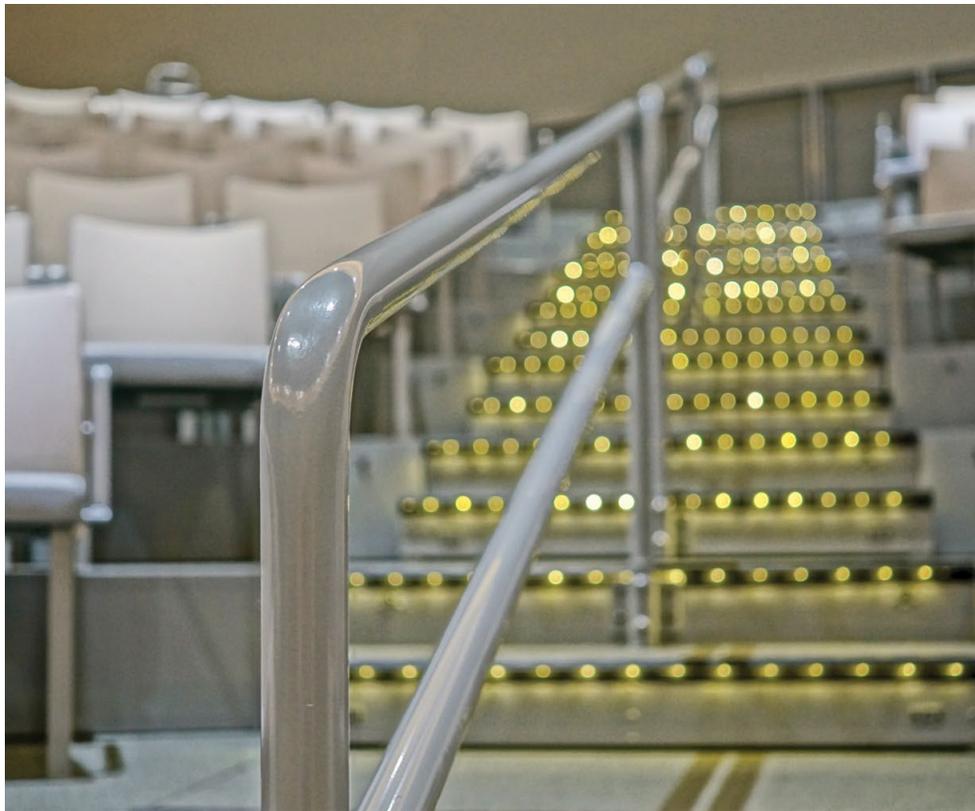
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perspective and it is important to account for the final dress up and finishing touches to a staging system.

Since a show choir's performances are highly customized, with variable choreography and blocking for each set, a modular system is the best option both on the road and at home. While it is relatively simple in design, the same type of platform used in this project would be perfect—as it is highly customizable and modular and features the ability to add skirting and clip-on closure panels to dress up a performance space in any way the designer sees fit.



Chelsea Johnson is the Marketing Specialist with Staging Concepts of Minneapolis, MN (www.stagingconcepts.com). Since 1990, Staging Concepts has provided the most advanced, modular, custom staging solutions for venues of all sizes in the Industry. To reach Chelsea, email marketing@stagingconcepts.com or call 800.337.5339.

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