



CASE STUDY

Phoenix Theatre Project | Phoenix, Arizona

BILCO Helps Modernize a Historic Phoenix Theatre Landmark

Before Steven Spielberg became one of Hollywood's most celebrated directors, he was a 17-year-old filmmaker with a \$500 science-fiction movie and a local theater willing to give him a stage. That theater was Phoenix Little Theater in Arizona, where Spielberg premiered *Firelight* in 1964 to a standing-room-only crowd.

More than six decades later, the theater, now home to The Phoenix Theatre Company, is once again changing what is possible on its stage. A major expansion designed by RSP Architects transformed a former black box theatre into a full-scale main stage venue while maintaining the character of the original campus.

The 17,500-square-foot expansion introduces a full fly tower, orchestra pit, automated floor traps, catwalks, lighting and projection capabilities, expanded seating and new backstage infrastructure. The project also required new access points to serve rooftop mechanical systems and theater operations.

Turning the former black box into a sophisticated performance venue presented several challenges for the design team. The theater remained fully operational throughout construction, with performances continuing in other spaces and theater camps taking place on the campus. The project also had to fit within a constrained site shared with the Phoenix Art Museum.

The location created additional considerations. The theater is close to the street, while mechanical equipment and aircraft overhead also contributed to the surrounding noise environment. Although performances would include amplified scenes and sound, quiet moments required the theater to remain as quiet as possible. Every opening therefore had to be considered as a potential source of noise.

"The scenes and the sound were going to be amplified, but anytime that there's a quiet moment the theater staff wants it to be really quiet because it's close to the street and every opening has to be treated like it was going to be a source of noise," said RSP Architects Project Architect Luis Cruz-Martinez. "That's why it was important for them that the hatches were insulated, and because of the large amount of equipment, that's why we wanted the largest hatch possible."

BILCO acoustical smoke vents and roof hatches were incorporated into the project to provide dependable access to critical areas while addressing the theater's acoustic requirements. Three acoustical smoke vents, each 6-feet x 8 feet, 6.5 inches, boast



industry-leading sound ratings while providing the security of automatic smoke venting. They are frequently specified on projects such as theaters and concert halls where noise intrusion can impact patron experience.

The project included multiple roof access points. Two large BILCO roof hatches support maintenance activities and provide access to the substantial amount of equipment associated with the new theater infrastructure. Foster Engineered Products, BILCO's manufacturer's rep in Arizona, provided the equipment which was installed by Progressive Roofing.

Through the expansion, The Phoenix Theater Company has given its historic campus new technical and performance capabilities with products from BILCO.

"BILCO, from my extent, is the standard in this profession," said Cruz-Martinez. "It's known industry-wide, the website is easy to navigate I can see all the different options depending on what I need."



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