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CASE STUDY

Playhouse in the Park | Cincinnati, OH

New Cincinnati Theater Includes BILCO Acoustical Vents, Roof Hatches

Theater construction has undergone a remarkable transformation since the opening of the Cincinnati Marx Theatre in 1968. The iconic venue proudly stood as the nation's oldest un-renovated mainstage and was cherished as a cornerstone of the community for generations, but technological sophistication was not its forte.

In March, the Playhouse in the Park unveiled a new \$50 million theater called Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre. Spanning 62,000 square feet, this architectural marvel not only offers unprecedented flexibility, but also addresses the essence of comfort, accessibility, sightlines and acoustics, elevating the theatrical experience to new heights.

The Rouse Theatre's design also presents the latest in stage technology. "The old Marx Theatre was built at a time when the focus was almost entirely on the actor," said Blake Robison, the long-time Producing Artistic Director said in an interview with BHDP, the architectural firm that designed the new theater. "So that theater was specifically designed to preclude the use of scenery on stage."

The new theater incorporates acoustical smoke vents as one of its notable features, serving as a barrier against noise intrusion – an element that was previously unavailable when the Marx Theatre opened its doors more than 50 years ago. Acoustical smoke vents in those projects provide the same benefit of standard smoke vents in removing smoke, heat and gases while also limiting noise intrusion.

BHDP Architects specified five acoustical smoke vents made by BILCO, a manufacturer of specialty access products. The 5-foot x 5-foot acoustical smoke vents feature industry-high ratings of STC-50, OITC-46 and ISO 140-18. Of particular significance for theaters, the OITC rating effectively prevents low-frequency sounds such as vehicular traffic and airplane noise, while the STC ratings guard against voices and other sources of interior noise.

"The architect selected the BILCO product based on the product features and the requirements for this application," said Todd Wright, Senior Project Manager for Messer Construction Company, the general contractor for the project.

Additionally, the architects chose three thermally broken roof hatches from BILCO measuring 2-feet, 6-inches x 2'-6 and 3' x 5' as part of the project. These hatches were included to facilitate access to stage equipment from the roof and include three inches of concealed polyisocyanurate insulation to help reduce energy expenses.



Immersed in the advancements that have revolutionized theater construction over the last five decades, the new theater embraces cutting-edge technological advantages. Among the features is the addition of a "fly gallery", an elevated tower overlooking the stage that has a plethora of innovative set design possibilities.

"The theater is going to be around for a long time," said Tom Arends, Design Leader and Partner at BHDP. "We wanted to be able to make sure that we could adapt to whatever changes are in the theater of the next 50 years. So, flexibility is built in as one of our key drivers."

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