



Alcon Builders Group completes Baryshnikov Arts Center: Vision of legendary namesake

November 08, 2010 - Design / Build

Alcon Builders Group recently completed construction on the Baryshnikov Arts Center or BAC, a stunning performance space that sets the bar on many levels: aesthetics, acoustics, technology and sustainability. Located at 450 West 37th St. and named for its iconic artistic director, the legendary choreographer/performer Mikhail Baryshnikov, under the umbrella of the Jerome Robbins Theater complex, the soon to be certified Gold LEED space creates a synergy that enhances the experience for both the audience and the performers.

Patrick Boland, president of Alcon Builders Group said, "The goal of the Baryshnikov Arts Theatre Group was to create a space worthy of not only the name but moreover the vision of Mikhail Baryshnikov. We were scrupulously careful with every detail from preconstruction due diligence through implementation and execution; and adhered to every step of the plans conceived by the world-renowned WASA/Studio A architects and Arup Engineering."

The task for the retrofit was both daunting and ambitious: to transform what was essentially a concrete box with a balcony - a generic, aesthetically nondescript, acoustically dead space devoid of any functional sound system and referred to by one reviewer as "sad, creepy, asymmetrical..." into an aesthetically pleasing performance arena that is one of the most technically advanced New York City theatres - possibly the most. The much lauded result has been hailed as "perfect" in its proportions, "dynamic and magnetizing," even "ravishing."

BAC executive director Stanford Makishi said, "The miracle of the Jerome Robbins Theater at the Baryshnikov Arts Center would not have been possible without all the members of our stellar team of professionals, each of whom worked creatively, cooperatively, diligently, and efficiently. At every stage of the project, Alcon Builders Group demonstrated a quiet confidence and remarkable ability to satisfy all our demands, no matter how extraordinary. Our theater renovation presented many daunting logistical challenges - not least of which was working on an accelerated schedule while keeping our building fully operational to our many patrons -- and Alcon made the vast tangle of trades about as invisible as they possibly could be. Indeed, Alcon's president Patrick Boland, vice president of operations John Dwyer, project manager Bill Conklin, and project superintendent Bob Schoendorf delivered spectacularly on every promise that things would be done and done well, on time, and within budget. And we are most grateful for all of it."

The team's utilization of Revit, 3-D model software, helped deliver the gut renovation on a fast-track 32-week schedule. Dwyer said, "A problem can be viewed and corrected before any work is done."

Key to achieving the desired audience/performer intimacy was a seating configuration that allows for unobstructed sightlines from any vantage point and positioning the balcony low to offer a sense of proximity. Conklin said, "The structural steel for the seating had to be positioned to a sixteenth of an inch. No margin for error."

Highly custom-calibrated acoustics, including a spring-loaded floor with isolators, were pre-tested in a sound lab. A digitally-controlled and fully motorized rigging system able to accommodate 1,750 lbs. and a winch speed of 20 feet per minute allows for multiple set changes. A sophisticated system of distributed lighting includes an extensive complement of dimmers. Elaborate, partially visible ductwork is both functional and integrated into the center's style.

The BAC expects to receive the LEED Gold rating for sustainability achieved through every phase from demolition (dust control, recyclable demolition materials), use of local suppliers, and use of such eco-friendly, recyclable materials as formaldehyde-free plywood, rulon, and LEED specific acoustical panels.

The end result is a thriving, highly versatile performance space winning kudos from reviewers and audience alike.

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