

Born Again

Jun 6, 2023



In San Francisco, a Romanesque church welcomes a new congregation.

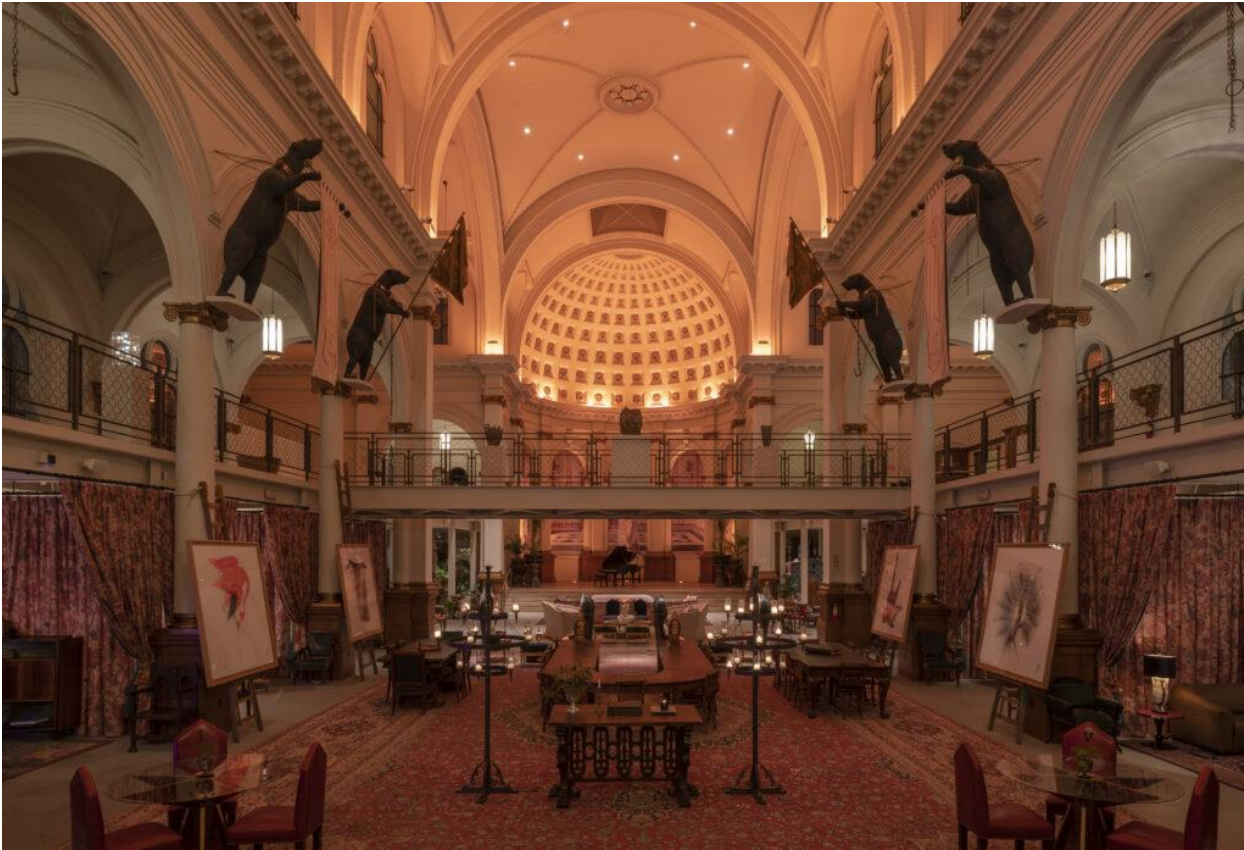
Even in a city like San Francisco, where creativity defines the culture and unexpected forms of art can be found around every corner, the Saint Joseph's Arts Society stands out. Set in a renovated Romanesque revival church, the new 22,000-sq ft arts hub—which is part members' club, part retail concept and part performance space—marries old-school grandeur with contemporary design, creating the ultimate backdrop for artistic expression and inspiration.



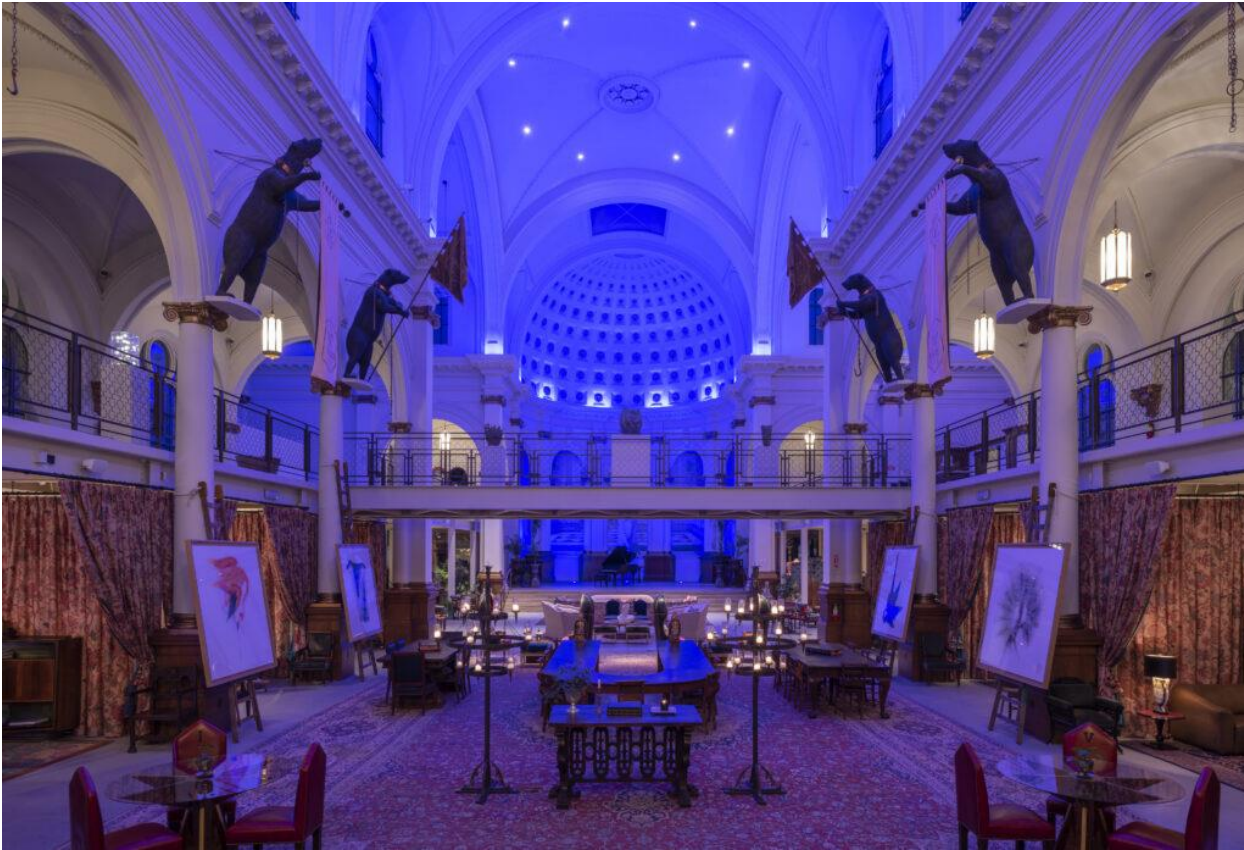
The extravagant space is the brainchild of interior designer Ken Fulk, whose vision was to transform the long-vacant landmark in his hometown into a multipurpose space for the local community. To carry out the four-year project, Fulk assembled a robust team of restoration specialists, architects and engineers, including lighting designers from EJA Lighting Design, San Francisco Bay Area, which went on to receive three 2022 IES Illumination Awards of Merit for the building's interior and exterior lighting and controls solution.



The overall goal was to create an aesthetic reminiscent of the Golden Age in Paris, beginning with the immaculately restored façade and exterior grounds. “The client wanted the exterior to feel like Paris—with a warm glow, but not overdone,” explains Eric Johnson, principal and founder of EJA. However, the solution also needed to adhere to Title 24 and National Historic Landmark requirements, which dictated that the exterior lighting be unobtrusive, low glare/light pollution and energy efficient, while blending the historic landmark into a vibrant urban environment.



The soaring interior space benefits from refreshed finishes and repaired stained-glass windows, as well as a smattering of lavish furnishings, antique sculptures and contemporary art. Illumination here also needed to highlight the historic architecture—and adhere to the same code requirements as the exterior—but required additional flexibility. “The interior lighting needed to be multipurpose,” Johnson says, as it serves a range of spaces including vast exhibition areas, eclectic ateliers, a domed performance stage, a book salon and cocktail lounge, and a French apothecary boutique.



Color tuning

transforms the venue's ambience for events and exhibitions.

To start, recessed, small-aperture adjustable LED downlights (Gotham Lighting) form a constellation-like pattern in the central vaulted ceiling, which is surrounded by architectural ledges containing color-tunable LED indirect strips (Ketra) to uplight columns. In addition, windows are lit by surface-mounted LED monopoint fixtures (LSI), and original decorative fixtures, refurbished and retrofit with LED sources, are located throughout.

“The key was to produce maximum effect through strategic placement of minimal fixtures,” Johnson says, which, like the exterior, both maintains the architectural integrity of the church and preserves accessibility for post-installation maintenance.



Exterior

fixtures can be dimmed to emphasize the dramatic effect of interior light radiating outward

Interior lighting is managed by a whole-project control system (Lutron), which enables flexible scene setting as well as adjustment of the color-tunable sources from 1400K to 10,000K. “Traditional decorative lighting, along with indirect color-tunable LED fixtures and accent lighting, is controlled through the system and app for different events and uses,” Johnson says. “It can dramatically and instantaneously transform the ambience from a harmonious glare-free reading lounge to an eccentric nightclub, and anything in between.”

The control system also helps manage energy use through automation and pre-sets for everyday energy and lighting management. Features include astronomical time-clock functionality with overrides, which enables activation at a prescribed time, as well as occupancy sensors to meet Title 24 requirements. Pre-set color and light levels are programmable and expandable for everyday use and for repeated events, such as performances and exhibitions.

The entire system is controlled via a touchscreen app with a user-friendly interface. Spontaneous events and schedule changes requiring overrides can also be easily managed using a local control keypad or in-wall buttons.

Johnson considers the app-controlled color and scene setting the most cutting-edge part of the project. That functionality also provides the project’s finishing touch, as tinted interior light shines outward through the windows in the evening, creating a profile of the building against the night sky. With light radiating from Saint Joseph’s, the site is now secure and welcoming—and the church is now ready for its new congregation.

THE DESIGNERS

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