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## **IN THIS ISSUE:**



## **ON THE JOBSITE**

Combined Sewer Overflow  
Project in Dearborn

## **INSURANCE/BONDING**

How to Avoid Pitfalls  
That Can Leave Your  
Business Underinsured

# *Seeing the Light*

*Specialized Lighting Techniques at U of M and K-12 Facilities*

Plus: **SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED** – The Much Anticipated IKEA Store Opens in Canton



# ENLIGHTENING FUTURE VICTORS

Junge Family Champions Center – University of Michigan (Ann Arbor)

By Wendi Sawchuk, Associate Editor • Photography By Peter Basso Associates, Inc.

**I**n December 2005, an important piece to the storied athletic tradition of the University of Michigan (U of M) in Ann Arbor was completed. The Junge Family Champions Center, located between the Crisler Arena and Michigan Stadium, primarily serves as a facility where prospective U of M athletes and families can visit before and after games to gain information and facts about the various University sports programs. It also accommodates other athletic-related functions as well. The 11,000-square-foot facility was designed by Rossetti Architects, Southfield, and includes an award-winning lighting design by Darko Banfic, a project leader and certified lighting design consultant with Peter Basso Associates Inc. (PBA), Troy. The project has earned a Section (Michigan) Illuminating Engineering Society of North America Award and an International Illumination Design Award of Merit, which recognizes outstanding



The lighting grazes the stone monolith piece to create shadows within the etching. It allows the "M" and quote to clearly stand out.

achievement and excellence in lighting design.

## IN THE MIDDLE OF HISTORY

Although the facility, itself, was small in scope at approximately 11,000 square feet, it was a rather complex project. This was mostly due to the location sand-

wich between the two monumental historic U of M athletic structures. It is connected to Crisler Arena and sits in front of Michigan Stadium adjacent to the grand staircase leading into the stadium. "That staircase is the prized possession of the University for the sports area because it acts as the processional to Michigan Stadium," said Tim Gawel, associate, Ford & Earl Associates, Inc. (formerly a project design architect with Rossetti Architects). "The small hill of land next to the staircase had to be dug out, removed, and then we had to connect into the existing Crisler structure. The new structure had to act as a platform to the extending plaza above. We literally pieced an 11,000-square-foot building into a little niche between the two larger facilities by removing the hillside."

The site restriction also impacted the ceiling height of the facility, narrowing the options for lighting solutions. During the lighting design process, it was the





**For evening events, this pre-function space is usually only illuminated by the monolith lights, which provide ample visibility.**

most challenging aspect for Banfic and his team, especially in the case of the main banquet room. "We knew that we would be stuck with a lower ceiling," said Banfic. "The original thinking was that the brighter we could make the ceiling the higher it would feel, but the luminaries would end up being mounted too low. We had to compensate for it and come up with more creative solutions." The facility consists of two main spaces, the front pre-function/gathering area at the entry, and the main banquet room beyond the glass wall/doors.

#### **PRE-FUNCTION/GATHERING SPACE**

Since the facility is surrounded by historic buildings with exterior materials such as brick and stone, the goal for the pre-function/gathering space was to reflect that tradition. The Rossetti design team wanted to make the interior space actually feel like an exterior plaza space. They accomplished this goal by not only utilizing the same brick, concrete, and floor materials, but also incorporating strategic artificial lighting techniques, as well as several clear glass windows to allow natural light to permeate the area. "The main lighting concept was to avoid generic can lights that would make it feel like an interior environment," said

Gawel. "We wanted it to have a dramatic exterior-lit feel. So, the interior columns are lit the same way as the exterior columns." Indirect cove up-lights illuminate the space for nighttime activities.

The key feature within the pre-function space is the massive cast stone monolith. In it, the traditional "M" and the famous Bo Schembechler quote, "Those who stay will be champions" are literally etched in stone. It is centrally located along the back blue wall of the space, just outside of the entry doors into the banquet room. Properly illuminating the piece was important because of the history, tradition and the meaning behind it. "When you are working with anything that involves etching, the most important thing is not to flood it with light," said Banfic. "We wanted lights close to the wall that graze the piece straight up from the floor and with down grazing from the ceiling. It creates shadows within the etching so that it stands out. If you flood it with lights by just hitting it straight on, the etching will lose the contrast and dramatic effect. We combined ground up-lights and overhead down-lights to make sure the monolith's brightness is evident at all times. It shows the depth of the etching." At the same time, the "M" is clearly visible from the outside through the clear

glass frontage. The subtle back-light behind the monolith assists in making it "float" in front of the dark blue backdrop.

During evening events, most of the ambient lights are turned off with only the lights illuminating the "M" turned on. It provides ample lighting for most pre-function socialization, but also allows the tradition of the piece to stand out. "It just feels like a unique space because there are not any glaring high hat lights or direct fluorescent overhead fixtures," said Gawel. "It's just a very clean ceiling plane where you really only notice two things: the brick and the stone 'M'."

#### **MAIN BANQUET ROOM**

Beyond the monolith "M", the attendees are able to see directly into the main banquet space through the glass. Their attention shifts into the environment created by the high-tech blue and white lighting design on the ceiling. The "M" almost acts as a transitional symbol that, as they move from history and tradition, they become a part of U of M's future. "Even though tradition is their moniker, they all want to be a part of a new future," said Gawel. "They want the tradition and to be part of the lore, but they also want to create their own path at U of M. So we created a very high-tech environment encased in tradition." Added Banfic, "We purposely wanted to create contrast between the two spaces. The idea was to have the tradition etched in stone, but also have the lure of seeing the distinctive blue or white light stripes that would draw people further in."

The overall lighting design in the banquet room incorporates stripes of interchangeable blue or white light patterns along a white ceiling plane. Between each stripe, there is a line of functional white down lights for illumination during dining periods. The linear stripe patterns within the ceiling are double-ended coves with blue lights on one side and white on the other. "There are a multiple number of lighting schemes for the space," said Banfic. "They can turn all of the stripes to blue or white, as well as light half of the room in blue and half in white, or even have both the blue and white light on simultaneously. It's all controlled and dimmable, so they can raise or lower the levels regardless of scheme. They can even choose to just turn on the ceiling perimeter in blue while the rest are white





The clear glass frontage allows exterior views into the pre-function space, as well as into the main banquet room with its dramatic linear lighting.

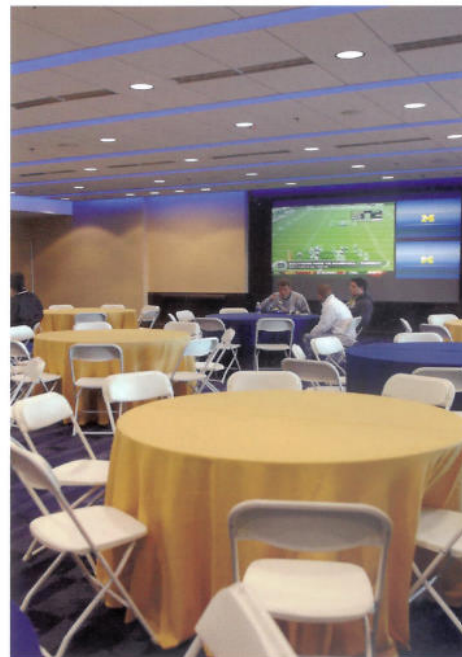
lights. It just depends on the event and function occurring in the space."

According to Gawel, "For a dining function, the blue lights with the white down lights are good because it puts the white light onto a plate with blue as an accent. The space itself is very multi-functional. They might have a dining event with several tables, or they can remove all of the tables and have just lounge-type chairs with side tables for a more casual event."

The low ceiling height forced several lighting re-designs due to mechanical requirements in such a restricted physical space. Since the room can accommodate about 300 guests, adequate cooling of the area was vital. That meant that most of the above-ceiling area was used for mechanical ductwork and equipment. The lighting scheme had to be designed around the mechanical requirements for the room. "In a space like this, you normally want a volume that is a much different proportion than what we were able to provide for lighting purposes," said Gawel. "If you stand in the middle of the room, the ceiling still feels low. So, the light striping was critical because it effectively breaks up the lowness enough visually so that people can gauge some depth perception."

The panels or "clouds" between the stripes actually serve to hide all of the branching ductwork for the mechanical system. "When we first started the job, PBA brought samples of some psychological schemes that we could achieve with the ceiling to add some height," said Gawel. "One of the designs that we considered was the inverse of what we currently have, which was creating a smaller rib that hung down from the ceiling and held the light. The light would have been thrown up onto the upper surface. But, as we got more into the mechanical requirements, we realized that we could not fit it into the given parameters. It was kind of a leap of faith because we didn't know how a small sliver/stripe of light was going to work versus the original plan (darker sliver of ceiling with a much broader light base). I think it came out really well because the blue color striping actually gives the space a more high-tech and edgier feel. Also, it also subtly replicates a football field with yard lines, especially at night with just the stripes lit."

Another lighting aspect within the main banquet room was the back wall with a mural of U of M athletics, as well as several video screens. During the design process, the team did not know exactly what would be included on the



This photo shows a typical banquet set up with the down white lights and blue linear lights turned on.

wall. As a result, they incorporated track lighting along the length of it. "The mural is an expansion of the stone 'M' that expresses tradition," said Banfic. "Even though the mural is very dark, it's a very warm space with a lot of incandescent halogen lighting illuminating the warm finish of the adjacent amber wall. The overall lighting scheme is blue, which can leave a cold feeling, but we have a perfect balance of warm lighting along the other walls."

## HIGHLIGHTING HISTORY, ENLIGHTENING THE FUTURE

The lighting design by PBA complements every aspect of the architecture and interior design of Rossetti Architects, whether it's to highlight the tradition and history within the pre-function space, or to achieve a more contemporary feel of the main banquet room. "One important thing is that the lighting really has to work with the architecture," said Banfic. "It has to complement it, not just supplement it. It's all about strategic placement that works with architecture."