



**Preservation
League of NYS**

Rochester's Little Theatre Receives a 2022 Excellence in Historic Preservation Award

This award from the Preservation League of NYS recognizes the best in the field of historic preservation

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EMBARGOED UNTIL 6:30 P.M. MONDAY, NOVEMBER 7

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Rochester, NY, 11/7/22 — Rochester's Little Theatre has been named one of this year's Excellence in Historic Preservation award winners. Since 1984, the League's annual Excellence Awards program has allowed us to shine a light on the people who are using historic preservation to make all our lives better — through exemplary restoration projects, indispensable publications, individual action, and organizational distinction.

Additional information about the 2022 Excellence Award winners, including interviews, videos, and more, can be found on our website: <https://www.preservenys.org/excellence-awards>

"We are honored to have the diligent and collaborative efforts of our client and the project team so recognized," said **Christopher Brandt, project architect with Bero Architecture**. "It is a rare privilege to have guided the rejuvenation of such a unique and beloved building that has meant so much to so many Rochesterians over the decades."

America's oldest art-house cinema, the 1929 Little Theatre has served as a progressive and inclusive cultural hub in the greater Rochester area for over 90 years. This rehabilitation project sought to restore and transform the building into a functional space that is also a communal place of shared memory, immersive aesthetic experience, and future possibility – supporting the continued success and expanded vision of a unique Rochester institution.

A thorough assessment of the building's existing condition and in-depth research into its history and significance in 2015 served as a guide for the repair, restoration, and reconstruction of specific architectural elements throughout. This body of knowledge likewise served as the design inspiration for the comprehensive rehabilitation that updated the theatre for contemporary uses.

The iconic Art Deco style of the building was enhanced, and lost elements of its design were brought back to life to create a more enveloping patron experience. The cinema is nearly land-locked, with the only room for expansion being a narrow open-air alleyway and inset corner at the rear of the building. The resulting design took a surgical approach to thoughtfully incorporating all the updated mechanical systems and new programmatic amenities without compromising the function or the historic integrity of the building.

The theatre's primary façade was restored to its original appearance, including repointing all terra cotta joints with their original black tinted mortar, reconstructing the missing multi-colored entryway tile floor border, curved leaded glass bulkhead windows, and shattered black glass spandrel panels, refinishing decorative wrought iron elements, and most notably rebuilding the main entryway to closely mimic the original entryway documented in a historic 1936 photograph. The new rear entry addition is clad on the interior and exterior with black terra cotta in an homage to the original.

Intact original elements including the lobby poster box, ticket booth, marble and wood moldings, decorative plaster, and doors were retained or saved and incorporated into the design. Original features that had been lost or damaged including wrought iron stair railings, crown moldings, auditorium sconces, primary room paint schemes, and most notably the auditorium seating, were faithfully reconstructed or restored. Elements of the original design that were never constructed due to budget constraints in 1929, including terrazzo flooring and a full-width stage with herringbone patterned oak floor were incorporated as key design elements of the rehabilitation project. All new elements including the concessions cabinetry, wood doors, wallpaper, and light fixtures were carefully selected to be like those seen in historic photographs or designed to be complimentary to the building's original Art Deco style. All this work was assessed both for its aesthetic appropriateness and longevity, with the understanding that these materials should remain in use for decades.

Throughout the project, the client, architect, and contractor team worked diligently to ensure that all tradespersons, and restoration specialists involved in the project, except for the seating manufacturer, were based locally to support critically important traditional trade skills.

"The Little Theatre has been restored to its original glory – with sensitive upgrades to bring it firmly into the 21st Century," said **Preservation League President Jay DiLorenzo**. "This project proves that historic buildings can be stewarded into the future – honoring their past while providing a place for people to gather today."

The rehabilitation of the Little Theatre was funded in part by grant funding from: NYS Empire State Development; the New York State Council on the Arts; and NYS Urban Initiatives.

In addition to their Excellence in Historic Preservation Award, the rehabilitation of the Little Theatre also received the Barber Conable Award from the Landmark Society of Western New York in 2020 and a Citation Award, People's Choice Award, and Community Impact Award from the Rochester Chapter of the AIA in 2022.

The Little Theatre project team included: **The Little Theatre Film Society / WXXI Public Broadcasting**, owner; **Bero Architecture, PLLC**, project architect; **UDN, Inc**, general contractor; **Jensen/BRV Engineering, PLLC**, structural engineer; **CW Engineering**, mechanical engineer; **Microindie Cinema**, cinema A/V consultant; **Applied Audio & Theatre Supply**, performance A/V consultant.

Recipients of the Excellence Award represent the very best of what the League stands for and supports in historic preservation. They exemplify best practices in the field and demonstrate how preservation is integral to building stronger neighborhoods, boosting local economies, tackling the affordable housing crisis, mitigating climate change, opening our eyes to overlooked history, and saving the places that are special to all of us. Our shared cultural heritage grounds us and unites us. The Excellence Awards celebrate those who work so hard to protect that shared heritage.

2022 Awardees:

- **Gowanda Hollywood Theater** | Gowanda, Cattaraugus County
- **Opendore Restoration** | Sherwood, Cayuga County
- **Art's Cafe** | Springville, Erie County
- **The Pavilion at Fort Ticonderoga** | Ticonderoga, Essex County
- **The Church of St. Luke & St. Matthew Exterior Restoration** | Brooklyn, Kings County
- **Edgemere Development** | Rochester, Monroe County

- **Rehabilitation of the Little Theatre** | Rochester, Monroe County
- **Steve Jordan** | Rochester, Monroe County
- **East Harlem South / El Barrio Reconnaissance-Level Historic Resource Survey** | Manhattan, New York County
- **Cochecton Pump House** | Cochecton, Sullivan County

The 2022 Excellence in Historic Preservation Awards are sponsored in part by Mr. Robert A.M. Stern, FAIA | Robert A.M. Stern Architects, LLP.

About the Preservation League of New York State

Since its founding in 1974, the Preservation League has built a reputation for action and effectiveness. Our goal has been to preserve our historic buildings, districts, and landscapes and to build a better New York, one community at a time. The Preservation League of New York State invests in people and projects that champion the essential role of preservation in community revitalization, sustainable economic growth and the protection of our historic buildings and landscapes. We lead advocacy, economic development, and education programs across the state.

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