

- Client:** Kideney Architects, P.C.
- Project:** Project narrative
- Objective:** Convince the panel to select the Shea's Performing Arts Center Façade Restoration for a Preservation League of New York State Award
- Outcome:** The project received a 2005 Preservation League of New York State Award in Project Excellence

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Shea's Performing Arts Center – Façade Restoration

History of Shea's

Shea's Performing Arts Center is listed on the *National Register of Historic Places* and is the anchor of Buffalo's Theater District. The 3,200 seat show palace was built in 1926 and fashioned after Europe's ornate opera houses. Shea's hosted internationally acclaimed performers until the popularity of stage shows declined. The building was forced to close in 1975 and was nearly demolished due to its severely deteriorated condition. The community later generated local and national enthusiasm for Shea's restoration, sparked by the singularity of its Wurlitzer Organ and the historic significance of the building.

Previous Restoration Projects

Shea's Guild leased the building in 1981 and took over building operations and the restoration process. Kideney Architects prepared a Master Plan documenting the building's history and an overall assessment its condition. The firm prioritized recommendations for repairs by need and impact. Recommendations were tied to a Feasibility Study to financially sustain the restoration.

The restoration process balanced building integrity repairs with functional improvements, interior restorations and available funding. Interior detailing is continually being restored under the auspices of Doris Collins, the Shea's Guild Restoration Consultant.

Kideney Architects designed and managed renovations to restore Shea's to its original splendor, while upgrading the facility to host Broadway entertainment. A brief list of completed projects includes:

- Master Plan and Feasibility Study (1993)
- Main Street Marquee and Arched Window (1994)
- \$13 Million Stagehouse Expansion (1997)
- Restoration of House Exterior (2000)
- Seating Reconfiguration and Wheelchair Positions (2001)
- Grand Lobby Door (2002)
- East Wall & Main Street Restoration (2003 & 2004)

Collaboration

Decisions regarding the repair or replacement of original building materials were scrutinized and made under consensus between The City of Buffalo Department of Public Works, Shea's Guild,

Kideney Architects and NYS Office of Historic Preservation Field Representatives. The General Contractor (Rodem's Construction), the Electrical Contractor (Frey Electric) and their subcontractors also contributed to this collaboration process.

East Wall & Main Street Restoration Project Challenges

The condition of the Main Street and North Office terracotta was assessed for project planning. Decades of tar and atmospheric stains were removed from the brick and terracotta on the East and North Office elevations using low pressure, low chemical non-acidic products. Repair mortar matched the original. Morris Masonry Restoration avoided over-cleaning the masonry and removing original materials wherever possible. The process reattached the East Wall brick to the steel substrate. Experienced window restoration consultants, Infinity Glass and Restoration, restored the wood double-hung windows.

Closer inspection of the terracotta found additional areas in need of replacement and repair. Boston Valley Terracotta, the original producers of Shea's terracotta and one of the country's few remaining terracotta manufacturers, produced replacement terracotta block to match the original glaze. Sections of the Main Street marble were so deteriorated that the Shea's Guild previously removed the original pieces, carefully storing them until this project. The marble's condition, porous as result of exposure, led to discussions of consolidation. However, the original marble panels were restored, repaired, polished and in some cases, pieced together. "Toni" marble matching the original marble was imported to replace missing panels above the entry doors.

Replica Pediment Challenges

Research citing letters between Rapp & Rapp, their engineers and local representatives pointed to the rapid deterioration of the original terracotta pediment. Within five years of construction, the pediment leaned precariously towards Main Street and had to be removed. The structural investigation concluded that the steel channels were insufficient to support the weight of the terra-cotta pediment and area snow loads. Rapid construction in the 1920s, combined with structural issues, led to the failure of the pediment.

Kideney Architects began a lengthy investigation to find an appropriate substitute material and selected non-Portland cement GFRC (glass fiber reinforced concrete). This product replicates the glazed terra-cotta used in the original pediment, but is not prone to deterioration. Kideney's specifications outlined the recreation of the pediment sculpture from old photographs. The process involved making precise and salvageable molds of the sculpture and creating light-weight, steel-frame-supported replica panels. Each step of the recreation required submissions and approvals to ensure satisfaction with the workmanship quality and material conformance.

Artisans from Buffalo Plastering hand-tooled mock imperfections in the faux panels to mimic the naturally occurring variations and aged appearance of individual terracotta blocks. The seamless blending of the new material, as observed by the community, speaks to the success of this effort.

Blade Sign & Arched Window Lighting Challenges

The Shea's Buffalo blade sign was removed in the 1970s due to the deteriorated condition of its tin faces and replaced with a contemporary movie marquee. Kideney's detailed research, specifications and documentation ensured the reproduction of the 65' x 8' sign. The new durable aluminum sign, fabricated by Total Identity Group, faithfully replicates the size and features of the original sign. Since the color of the original sign was unknown, Kideney prepared several color schemes commonly used for signage during the 1920s. A new steel structure replaced the remnant support steel that had disintegrated beyond use. Energy efficient LED lamps were

individually sand-blasted to match the coloration of incandescent lamps. The arched window, originally lit by individual socket lamps, could not be re-introduced without adversely affecting the terracotta. The 1970s linear lamping was replaced with an UL listed, Tivoli LED lamping system to approximate the appearance, quality and spacing of the original incandescent lamps.

Impact

The East Wall & Main Street Restoration Project completes the restoration of the building envelope. This enables Shea's to focus on interior restoration. Meanwhile, Shea's preservation has motivated other Theater District businesses to undergo restoration. Buffalo is fortunate to have many terracotta faced buildings, and the success of the Shea's pediment replacement suggests that lost embellishments can be reintroduced to other local landmarks.

Buffalo is currently voted #4 in *American Style Magazine's* list of the *Top Ten US Arts Destinations*. The Historic Theater District is one of Buffalo's most significant cultural assets, and Shea's anchors the District. Shea's successful restoration, together with an all-star line-up of Broadway musicals, brings much-needed business to downtown Buffalo. Reports indicate that Shea's has a \$5.5 million annual economic impact on the community. For these reasons, we feel that this project is deserving of a state-wide award for Excellence in Preservation.