THE NEW SHANGHAI THEATRE HONORED WITH IALD AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

LIGHTING DESIGN BY UNOLAI LIGHTING DESIGN LENDS ROMANCE TO A FORMAL SPACE

CHICAGO, IL USA, 9 MAY | Luminaries of the lighting profession gathered at Chicago’s trendy Revel Fulton Market on 9 May to honor the winners of the 35th Annual International Association of Lighting Designers (IALD) International Lighting Design Awards. Seventeen projects from eleven countries were on display – including interiors, workspaces, museums, hospitality sites, and a place of worship. This year’s winners represent some of the most innovative and inspiring work found anywhere in the world of architectural lighting design.

The design of the New Shanghai Theatre in Shanghai, China, with lighting design by Unolai Lighting Design, took home an Award of Excellence, accepted in person by Uno Lai, IALD, Jenna Liu, and Kelvin Wu.

The romance between light and darkness, choreographed by architecture and intensified by illumination, breathes life into the New Shanghai Theatre. Embedded within the Shanghai streetscape, a heavy stone façade tucks inward to invite passage at the human scale. Warm fluted bronze walls, accentuated by custom sconces, draw visitors across the threshold. Subtle coves allow these walls to “float,” evoking the rich folds of theatre curtains. Stepping inward, visitors’ eyes immediately lift to a vaulting skylight. Light plays a starring role throughout: luminous voids counterbalance heavy mass, and strategically augmented skylights deepen the dramatic dialogue between illumination and shadow.

Throughout the New Shanghai Theatre, strategically calculated electric light plays a supporting role within the skylights, drawing out the melody of the ever-changing interaction of daylight on architecture. Heavy stone masses are counterbalanced by vaulting, luminescent voids revealing movement in the sky and within the building’s envelope. To achieve this effect, close collaboration with the architect was required from concept to execution. Ambient luminescence is overwhelmingly perceived as cool natural light, augmented by LED fixtures strategically selected and angled to follow the sun’s movement over the architecture. In contrast, the language of focal glow is warm, understood as daylight’s electric counterpart, and theatrical sparkle dances along walls and hovers weightlessly in sudden openings in the building’s tectonic presence.

Exhaustive sun studies were conducted to allow for an “invisible” enhancement of daylight through seven roof apertures. The site came with strict limitations on horizontal daylight access, so these skylights were crucial in creating a dramatic inside/outside dialogue. The lighting design challenge was to employ the deep wells of the skylights to their maximum effect while minimizing all excess energy use and reducing the building’s contribution to light bleed in a city notorious for over-illumination. Studying the sun’s path across the architecture, a series of mockups and models informed the precise placement, specification, and angling of LED fixtures within the skylights.

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Another key technical challenge was the strict exclusion of visible ceiling fixtures, including downlights, throughout the architect’s aesthetic brief. In order to achieve the minimum lux levels required for the building program, creative “workarounds” were employed. Subtle linear coves slip light onto the floor plane to meet circulation needs. Material mockups were crucial in ensuring that light was bounced indirectly off surfaces to increase vertical illuminance. Custom decorative pendant lights were hung in higher spaces. In narrower spaces, linear coves were tucked both into floor and ceiling pockets, with custom wall sconces filling the space in between.

This new landmark creates a nostalgic presence in the historic JingAn neighborhood—with moody, restrained lighting that recalls old Shanghai, renewing a relationship with the skies above. Lighting design brings the building’s performance to life, welcoming a wide audience and enlivening the true stars of the show: the weight and mass of shadow, and the breathing dance of light.

The IALD Lighting Design Awards program, established in 1983, honors lighting projects that display high aesthetic achievement backed by technical expertise. A panel of award-winning lighting designers, architects and interior designers review the projects in a three-day, anonymous review process. Full information about the judging process can be found in the 35th Annual IALD Awards Call for Entries.

For complete details and high resolution photos of this year’s award-winning projects, visit iald.org/awards.

The International Association of Lighting Designers (IALD), established in 1969, is an international organization supporting a network of more than 1,400 lighting design professionals who satisfy its rigorous qualification process. Its members are distinguished by a unique blend of aesthetic and technical expertise, and operate at the highest level of integrity to create a better world through leadership and excellence in lighting design; to cultivate the universal acknowledgement and appreciation of the Power of Light in human life.

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