**The Lila Cockrell Theatre – San Antonio, Texas**

**A Unique Tile Installation Sparkles in the Bright Lights**

From an Aging Liability to a Marketable Asset

In 1968, San Antonio, Texas was the site of the first World’s Fair ever to be held in Texas. During the construction for HemisFair ‘68, a theatre to host cultural events was built as part of the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center on the Riverwalk. After its opening, little was done to maintain the appearance of the theatre, though it was named the Lila Cockrell Theatre in honor of the first female mayor of San Antonio in the 1980s.

In May, 2009, all that changed. Local performing arts groups and the adjacent convention center had most often utilized the facilities, but a renovation was now undertaken to provide an updated venue for a much wider array of multimedia performances. The run-down theatre began undergoing a face lift that changed the aging liability into a marketable asset Mechanical and HVAC systems were updated; newer, more comfortable seating was installed, and glass tile was chosen as a means to connect the visual update of the four levels of the theatre.

Twelve 80-foot-tall columns in the lobby of the theatre support the curtain wall across the front of the atrium, and 12 more support and visually connect the main floor and balconies. The architects from Marmon Mok (San Antonio, Texas) selected a red-and-orange theme, from the red seats in the auditorium to the red-and-orange carpeting and the red glass tiles to cover two sides of the columns. The long sides of the rectangular columns retained their original mechanically affixed stone panels; but the shorter sides – originally covered by plaster with an acrylic finish were replaced with the dramatic glass tiles.

A Smooth Installation

Byrne Construction Services of San Antonio had just completed a large job at the San Antonio Airport with the aid of Delta Granite, and they asked for Delta’s help again on the Lila Cockrell Theatre renovation project.” It was a very unique installation,” said David Rymer, President of Delta Granite. “The ceiling needed extensive renovation, so Byrne Construction scaffolded the entire atrium area, which helped us out considerably.”

The Delta crew first had to remove the existing acrylic-coated plaster using angle grinders. Then they hoisted the glass tiles up the scaffolding one box at a time and worked on setting the tile on the columns from the top down. “We were very impressed with MAPEI’s *Adesilex P10* mortar for this installation,” Rymer said. “Heavy as that glass tile was, the *Adesilex P10* held it without sagging.” The individual tiles were set on a 12” x 12” mesh backing in a staggered pattern. The edges of each panel interlaced with the next panel. The installers grouted the glass tile joints with *Keracolor U* unsanded grout

The red glass tiles were custom-designed in various shades by Daltile from their Maracas series, using long sticks of glass tile of different widths and lengths. When the first design of the tiles were submitted, the architects felt two of the colors that were very similar were too close together, so Daltile repositioned the colors to everyone’s satisfaction. Though this delayed the tile delivery slightly, Byrne had provided a reasonable amount of time for Delta to complete the tile installation, and everything went smoothly.

When the scaffolding for the ceiling work was removed, Delta Granite rented a special Spider Lift from a firm in Austin. This lift was able to be positioned inside the theatre lobby, and carried installers up via a “basket” to put the finishing touches on the glass tile facing the atrium. On the rear side of the columns supporting the main floor and the balconies, they were able to work in 20-foot stretches that give added sparkle to the view when theatre goers exit the auditorium.

Delta Granite did additional tile work in the theatre as well. They set 1” x 1” glass tiles in the same variety of red shades on the walls around water fountains and display areas and on 20-foot panels in the Mayor Cockrell meeting room on the river level, again using *Adesilex P10* mortar and *Keracaulk U* grout.

After waterproofing the existing and additional newly constructed bathroom wet areas with *Mapelastic AquaDefense* liquid waterproofing membrane, they set 18” x 18” ceramic porcelain tiles from Crossville in a mixture of solids and patterns on the floors with MAPEI’s *Ultracontact* mortar. On the walls of the bathrooms, they installed 6” x 12” porcelain subway tile with *Ultraflex 1* mortar and grouted them with *Keracolor U.*

Distinctive 4” x 16” wood-grained porcelain tile (Casa Dolce Casa – Belque series) was installed all the way around the insides and outsides of the concession stands, in border areas in front of and around the elevators and in the areas surrounding the drinking fountains. The elongated tile was also installed on the river level in front of the Mayor Cockrell Room, with a patterned carpet inset in the middle. This tile was all set with *Ultracontact* mortar and grouted with *Keracolor S.*

Delta Granite brought dramatic life to the old theatre with their red glass tile columns, and MAPEI is proud to have been part of the renovation.

SIDEBAR – The Juan O’Gorman Mural

This mural is visible from the east bank of the Riverwalk on the facade of the Lila Cockrell Theater. The mural, *Confluence of Civilizations in the Americas*, was created by Juan O'Gorman as part of the 1968 HemisFair. The mural symbolizes the progress made by the confluence of civilizations in the Western Hemisphere. Adam and Eve are in the middle; European civilization is depicted on the right, and indigenous meso-American civilization on the left. The Tower of the Americas (built for the HemisFair in 1968) also symbolizes the confluence of civilizations.

SIDEBAR – The Crystal Chandeliers (from mysanantonio.com)

Two original lobby chandeliers were saved and cleaned with surprising results. Architects had assumed the monumental chandeliers were made of a yellowish, frosted milk glass. But once an electrician cleaned them with plain old Ivory soap, it turned out that the chandeliers' clear glass had been caked in cigarette smoke, a remnant from the days when the stylish thing was to smoke during intermission."They were that dirty," said Mary Bartlett, associate partner at Marmon Mok Architecture. Newly installed LED lights mean the chandeliers can change color for various events or performances.

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