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LIV Nightclub In Miami

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Breathes New Life Into The Billion-Dollar-Renovated Fontainebleau Hotel



For the theatrical package, designed by SJ Lighting, Elation Design Spot 575s are the main moving lights overlooking the dance floor, with Design Spot 300s on the mezzanine level.

When the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach underwent a billion dollar renovation and expansion, SJ Lighting and Focus Lighting were called upon to contribute designs for the new LIV nightclub. The rounded venue, located in the former famed Club Tropicana originally designed by Morris Lapidus in 1954, features multiple levels, an 88' dome ceiling with more than 800 LED fixtures, private framed skyboxes, a glowing staircase, and three bars. Classical chandeliers create a visual connection to the warmth of the backlit VIP boxes while contrasting with the modernist space. A removable railing allows the rear VIP level to be converted to a full stage, turning the space into a fully functional live performance venue.

An added bonus, LIV also has excellent sightlines. In fact, the club's opening night hosted the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show After-Party, with some of the show replayed on the video screens throughout the party. "As the Tropicana, this club was once a stomping ground for performers such as Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr.," says Paul Gregory, principal at Focus Lighting. "Now, as LIV, the space is updated with new technology and decor for the next wave of talent." With interiors by Vincent Celano and Gonzalo Bustamante of Seed Design and audio by Sound Investment, LIV promises to live up to its pedigree as one of the hottest haunts in an already hot city. Steve Lieberman of SJ Lighting — who also recently completed Shrine at MGM Foxwoods ("Shrine O' The Times," *Live Design*, January 2009) — conceived the theatrical and video design, while Joshua Spitzig of Focus Lighting did the architectural lighting design.

Focus Lighting, which also supplied the architectural lighting package, joined the project in 2006, brought in by the architects, but Lieberman actually inherited the project from another consultant who worked on the project for about a year. "We started the theatrical and video design from scratch," says Lieberman. "It became an extremely fast-track project, probably at most three-and-a-half months, which is pretty quick from design to development."

According to Spitzig, from the beginning, the client wanted "an upscale, sophisticated, see-and-be-seen club that would attract A-list celebrities," he says. "As a design team, we embraced the vision of the original architect, Morris Lapidus, who believed in making guests feel elegant and pampered by giving them dramatic decor, striking views, and strong entrances."

Lieberman says that, from a theatrical perspective, his clients usually want, "as much bang for their buck as possible — high impact moving light package, lasers. In fact, they don't really even know what they want necessarily, but they want to be impressed and have it be clean and immersive. That's a pretty vague and ambiguous directive, in a sense, so as club designers, we have to tell them. More direction on the feel of the space actually comes from the interior designer than the clients."

The three major features of the interior design are the dome, the VIP skybox frames, and the grand stairs. "We made sure that the lighting emphasized these components in a way that helped them define the space more clearly," says Spitzig. "When you stand in the club and squint your eyes, those are the main things you see. We put a lot of work into making these elements look great."

Among those efforts was finding corrugated plastic skylight material to line the skybox frames and stair treads. “This isn't what the material was made for, but we discovered that, when you put the plastic in front of an LED strip, it refracts the light into lines that move as you walk past,” says Spitzig. “Normally, we try to hide the view of LED nodes at all costs, but in this case, the refractions make the stairs and frames sparkle like big rectangular chandeliers.” The grand stair is another great example of the venue's grandeur. “When you walk down the steps to the main floor, you're on stage,” says Spitzig. “The whole club can see you make your entrance. Another aspect of going back to Lapidus' original ideas was celebrating the circular plan and the dome.”

THE DOME

The dome is certainly one of the main attractions. “As the lighting designers, we want to create an emotion,” says Gregory. “For instance, the dome in the main dance hall is used to emulate a starlit sky. By recreating a night sky inside a club, we trigger things within the patrons, other emotional memories, which help burn this image of LIV into their memories.”

To maintain the dome, which was staying put from the original structure, nothing was allowed to penetrate it. “I inherited this — what they were calling the ‘spider truss,’” Lieberman says of the infrastructure supporting the dome, a custom ground-support substructure built by Tomcat. “It is solid beam but curved to the radius of the dome with pipe on it that we use as hanging positions. It's the only place to hang theatrical fixtures over the dance floor.”

Focus Lighting used it for architectural lighting, as well. Spitzig echoes Lieberman's comments about the inability to suspend anything substantial in that area for structural reasons. “They let us attach the 12" LED fixtures to it, but we couldn't hang any theatrical or accent fixtures from it,” he says. “That led to the development of that overhead support structure. The whole design team brainstormed, and we ended up with a curved structure of 8"×12" rectangular steel tubes that is supported by eight steel columns. The columns go all the way down to footings below the foundation. The curve of the overhead structure is meant to follow the curve of the dome, and the structure supports both theatrical and architectural lighting fixtures.”

The 88' dome itself is internally lit by LEDs, approximately 585 Philips Solid-State Lighting Solutions/Color Kinetics iColor Cove MX units that create a low-resolution video matrix, and lined on its perimeter with 300 ColorBlast 12 fixtures that wash the surface of the dome. “Detailing the iColor Cove MX fixtures that are embedded in the dome was another big challenge,” says Spitzig. “The acoustical consultant recommended 2" of sound-absorbing material on the surface of the existing dome, so we used this to mask our fixtures. The iColor Cove MX is mounted within 2"-deep channels attached directly to the original surface of the dome. The channels radiate out from above the center of the dance floor like spokes. The acoustical material was applied to the dome in the areas between these channels and then troweled flush to the edges of channels. This creates a condition where the lighting fixtures are effectively recessed into the finished surface of the dome.” Motor City Electric from Detroit and Tri City Electric from Florida worked together on the installation of the architectural lighting.

Once everything was installed, another challenge was finding the right balance of light levels. Since there are so many iColor Cove MX fixtures in the LED array in the dome, turning them on at full is just a tad too bright, or “like high noon,” says Spitzig. “In fact, we programmed

the embedded LED dome fixtures into the cleanup look that gets turned on at the end of the night to tell people to go home.”

Because of this, color and intensity of the programmed content for the dome was a careful consideration. “It's tempting to think of it as just a giant low-res video screen, but it's also a huge lighting fixture,” says Spitzig. “We might come up with a beautiful water effect using green and blue lights that looks great when you look up at the dome, but the light that gets cast down onto the patrons below wouldn't make them look good. Even Paris Hilton doesn't look good in green light.” To account for this, while the overall light levels on the dance floor get dimmer and dimmer as the night wears on, the effects that run through the dome matrix get dimmed down as well.

In addition to the LEDs embedded in the surface of the dome and circling its perimeter, LEDs appear in many other architectural treatments throughout the venue, including the backlit treads of the grand stairs, the glowing skybox frames, the light stripes in the bathroom vanity mirrors, the liquor risers at all of the bars, and the glowing oculus in the entry vestibule — all lit with rows of Philips Solid-State Lighting Solutions/Color Kinetics eWhite Cove Powercore. “The walls of the entry area and of the VIP lounge were grazed with LED strips by Boca Flasher,” adds Spitzig. “The rest of the club is primarily lit with MR16 accents along with some custom chandeliers throughout the space.”

DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY

One of the main concerns for Lieberman was the client's request to bring power consumption down. “When I joined the project, the previous design had something like 40 or so 208V circuits, three equipment racks, two full-sized dimmer racks, and they were concerned about electrical, as far as installing it, having the power in the building to accommodate it, and the cost of operating the system,” he says. “They asked two things: to cut down power and eliminate all the 208V circuits.”

As expected, Lieberman turned to several LED sources, including the Elation Impression LED, which he describes as “lightweight, super-bright, and super-fast, with very low power consumption.” These are hung on 14" centers, approximately 40' off the dance floor. For the central effects package, Lieberman used Elation Design Spot 575s as the main moving lights from the dome overlooking the dance floor area. “We also put Elation Design Spot 300s on the mezzanine, since the height is only 5', for a more dynamic look at different heights and over the stage for detail with some theatrical truss on hoists,” Lieberman says. Martin Wizards are also fixed on the mezzanine level to give what Lieberman calls “a nice classic disco effect to the club without being tacky.” Tomcat provided all truss in the venue.

Lieberman also added another green element to the venue's lighting system by eliminating almost all of its dimming, using LED PARs in place of any traditional conventional. “The only conventionals I have that are dimmable are audience blinders,” he says. “I needed eight circuits, and Focus Lighting basically pulled them out of their panel for me. I ran every fixture 120V, and in all these environments where I have LED PARs, I can put 20 on one circuit. I cut about 60% of the electrical contract.” For LED PARs in LIV, Lieberman has Elation Tri PAR units.

Another modified area is around a curtain detail over the performance stage, where a lot of dimming and conventional units were planned in the original theatrical package. “That stage

is also a VIP environment, so it would have been really warm up there with a spotty wash on that curtain, at best,” says Lieberman. “You're either going to put an expensive piece of glass in a unit there or have to replace gel all the time, so instead, I used Elation DLED 60 battens — five for each curtain — and they all fit on one circuit, and the power jumps between them. We went from 48 channels of dimming to two 20A circuits, and it's a nice, even linear wash with no heat over the curtain.” SJ Lighting subcontracted labor and installation to idesign.

Above the DJs head on a shelf is a LaserNet ScannerPro 3W White Laser that blasts out over the crowd from the center point of the staircase, amplified by bounce mirrors throughout the space. An MA Lighting grandMA light console controls lighting and the video server system.

As for video systems, also overseen by SJ Lighting and included in the interior design itself, it's relatively straightforward, with plasma screens behind smoked glass — three behind each of two bars and one in a quieter library bar — and a Da-Lite 16'×9' front projection screen against the back wall of the performance stage fed by a Christie Digital LS500 5,000-lumen projector. Lieberman designed the control system that manages video for the entire venue, including a Crestron system and a coolux Pandoras Box media server that is the source for anything on any screen. “We are putting sources and devices together that control all video,” says Lieberman, who also handled the integration, including the screens, DVD players, video servers, and matrix.

CONTROL

The architectural lighting system, including everything from the dome to the restroom fixtures, is controlled with an e:cue system via a 17" touchscreen and fader unit set up next to the MA Lighting grandMA light. The interface, programmed by Dan Henry of Focus Lighting, with input from e:cue, runs low-res video through the LED dome fixtures, as well as geometric effects, chases, and strobes. All of the architectural lighting elements can be controlled by the light jockey at the same time as the theatrical fixtures. “There are controls that allow the effects rate to be manipulated to match the music,” says Spitzig. “The system is capable of receiving a signal from the grandMA to trigger various cue lists, but most of the time, the light jockey likes to have his hands directly on the e:cue controls for the dome effects. He sometimes switches between the theatrical console and the dome controls, and sometimes he keeps one hand on each controller.”

Jeff Novak is LIV's technical director who runs the show each night. “He's able to layer a lot of treatments and effects when it's needed,” says Spitzig. “For example, the light jockey might sometimes be piling on scanners with theatrical wash fixtures, then a colored glow at the perimeter of the dome and a video pattern running on the embedded dome fixtures, all of which is framed by the backlit skyboxes. He can also strip the lighting down to one or two basic elements at once. He can turn off everything including the skybox frames, the chandeliers, and the dome, and just play with the theatrical fixtures in a nearly dark space. Or he kills all of the lights except for the dome and creates a light show on the ceiling.”

“The marriage of lighting design and architecture is really what made this job great,” says Gregory. “Working with an amazing original structure, the renovations paid great attention to the original design, and the lighting brings out every architectural detail.”

CREDITS

INTERIORS/DESIGN ARCHITECTS

Seed Design

THEATRICAL AND VIDEO SYSTEMS DESIGN: SJ LIGHTING

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ARCHITECTURAL LIGHTING DESIGN TEAM: FOCUS LIGHTING

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Joshua Spitzig, Lighting Designer

Dan Henry, Assistant Lighting Designer

Darin Fowler, Assistant Lighting Designer

THEATRICAL LIGHTING AND VIDEO INSTALLATION

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Brian Baron, Projectionist

Eric Carosiello, Rigger

Javier Lopez, Lighting Crew

Nestor Thomas, Lighting Crew

Christine Wilhite, Support

ARCHITECTURAL LIGHTING INSTALLATION

Motor City Electric

Tri City Electric

FOR LIV

Jeff Novak, Technical Director

LIV

GEAR

LIGHTING AND EFFECTS

22 Elation Design Spot 575E

4 Elation Design Spot 300E

8 Elation Impression

25 Elation Opti Tri PAR

10 Elation DLED 60 Strip

5 Martin Professional Atomic 3000 DMX Strobe

4 Martin Professional Wizard Extreme

4 Jem ZR33 Hi-Mass Atmosphere Generator

4 TMB Procan 4-Lite Audience Blinders

1 LaserNet ScannerPro 3W White Laser

VIDEO

1 Christie Digital LS500 Projector

1 Da-Lite Da-Snap Fixed Frame Screen

1 coolux Pandoras Box Media Server

1 Magenta Mondo Matrix Cat5 Switcher

9 Magenta MultiView AK600DP Receiver

5 Magenta MultiView XRTx Universal Transmitter

2 Tascam DV-D01U DVD Player

1 Crestron Crestron Isys[®] TPS-15 Tilt Touchpanel

1 Crestron Pro2 Professional Dual Bus Control System

1 Crestron AV2 Dual Bus Control System

6 Crestron C2COM-3 Port Control Card

2 Crestron C2ENET-2 Dual Port Ethernet Card

CONTROL/DISTRIBUTION

1 MA Lighting grandMA light Console

1 Mid-Atlantic WRK Series 19" Rack Enclosure

1 Mid-Atlantic PTRK Series Portable Rack

2 Mid-Atlantic 115V Rackmount Power Strips

2 Mid-Atlantic PDT Series Thin Power Distribution

4 Doug Fleenor DMX512 Isolated Splitter/Amplifier

Belden 89841 Multi-Conductor Cable

Belden 7934A DataTuff[®] Industrial Ethernet Cables

Belden 88761 22/2 Shielded FEP Insulated Control Cable

Gepco LSK04 Ultra-Low Skew UTP Cable

ARCHITECTURAL LIGHTING

600' Philips Solid-State Lighting Solutions/Color Kinetics iColor Cove MX Powercore

774' Philips Solid-State Lighting Solutions/Color Kinetics eWhite[®] Cove Powercore

243 Philips Solid-State Lighting Solutions/Color Kinetics ColorBlast[®] 12 Powercore

42 Philips Solid-State Lighting Solutions/Color Kinetics ColorBlast 12 TR Powercore

1050' American Lighting 1/2" Rope Light

20' Boca Flasher AC1002 LED Striplight

26' Boca Flasher High Power Light Strip LED

10 CSL SC Recessed Adjustable MR16 Downlight Housing w/2090 Trim

4 CSL Decorative Downlight Housing RLV-1.8-NCE w/RLV-2620AB Trim

8 ETC Source Four PAR EA

3 Edison Price Recessed Adjustable AR111 Downlight

20 Juno ULH322 Undercabinet Task Light

264 Liton LH1499 MR16 Downlight Housing w/LR1420WD Trim

94 Lumiere Cambria Outdoor Adjustable MR16 Fixture

60 Ruud GL51 Steplight

330' TPR Deon LED

14 Times Square PAR38 Surface-Mounted Adjustable Fixture

67 Times Square Mark III Low-Voltage Step-Cylinder for 12V PAR 36.

ETC Sensor+ Dimming Racks

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