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Shrine O' The Times

Feb 3, 2009 11:00 AM, *By Marian Sandberg*



The new MGM Grand at Foxwoods Resort and Casino in Mashantucket, CT is the culmination of a \$700 million build that added a hotel/casino, as well as 115,000sq-ft. of meeting and convention space, to Foxwoods. At the heart of it all is Shrine Asian Kitchen, Nightclub, and Lounge, the

20,000sq-ft. stylized dining venue and club owned by Big Night Entertainment. One of four restaurants at MGM, with a theatrical lighting package designed by Steve Lieberman of SJ Lighting, Shrine strives to offer a Las Vegas-style nightlife experience within a classic Asian-designed interior. And with investors from DJ Riz of the Crooklyn Clan and Anthony DeCotis, owner of Rain in Las Vegas, and a state-of-the-art sound system from Funktion One zoned through the entire facility, that shouldn't be too hard to achieve.

The two-story venue is set directly off the casino floor adjacent to the Performing Arts Theatre and main ballroom, with 85' of casino frontage. With a capacity for 1,200 guests, several bars, a 3,000sq-ft., two-story outdoor terrace overlooking the hotel's fan-shaped pool, two private dining rooms, sushi bar, full kitchen, and a 225-seat dining room, multiple spaces reveal themselves upon entering the venue. "This is a restaurant/ultra lounge/nightclub with many different environments to accommodate even two or three private events simultaneously. It is closed off so you don't even know what's going on in the nightclub area," says Lieberman.

To outfit the venue's lighting looks, Lieberman was on board from the beginning of the build, coming in as a subcontractor via Sound Investment, the audio vendor and installer for the project. "The operating company trusted our experience to put a system together for them, but obviously, there were parameters that we needed to stay within," Lieberman says. "Typically when you speak to the operator of a nightclub, they say, 'Wow me. We want the best in the world.' They *all* want the best system in the world."

Lieberman says the main goals he always strives to achieve are to be creative without fighting the architecture in the venue, provide a system that's as versatile as possible for various types of events, and also "user-friendly without going into Lighting 101 for an operator, and still providing that wow factor," he says. "We try to mix elements in there and give them layers, so there are several fixture types for them to play with through the course of the night and elements they can use for various special and corporate events."

One particular challenge at the outset was incorporating the sound system into the lighting truss system. "We needed to do a custom winch installation, and our trussing needed to support all of the sound system as well," Lieberman says. "The last thing we want is a system that looks like it's forced, as opposed to one that looks like it's planned, so I pretty much accommodated the sound system first. Once we knew that was happening with the shared truss, we stopped what we were doing and drew everything around the sound system."

At the foundation of Lieberman's rig for the dance floor area, where the main theatrical lighting is hung, are three truss positions, two L-shaped trusses and one straight truss, all custom fabricated by Total Structures. Custom T-pipes also hang off each truss to add dimension and motion to the rig. "We wanted to get fixtures at different height levels without putting truss everywhere," Lieberman says. "There are four custom winches from Skjonberg Controls that pick everything up on motor control, so each L-shaped truss and the straight truss are on a custom winch that moves up and down." A birdcage chandelier designed by Niemitz Design Group, the architectural lighting and interior designer for the space, is also on a movable winch system.

The lighting rig itself comprises Elation Octopod 80s lining the longer T-pipes that create what Lieberman describes as a "sort of drag racing striplight system." Elation Design LED 36 units on the balcony above the DJ booth for dancers and special performances add "the typical complement of dance floor fixtures — spot fixtures, a couple of wash fixtures, and Atomic Strobes with color scrollers," he says. The rig is controlled via an MA Lighting grandMA light.

The video system also serves the variety of events the venue is intended to accommodate. "We

put in the High End Systems Axon media server and two DVD players, so when a corporate comes in, they can just load their JPEGs or movie files and just put their branding on the screens,” Lieberman says. “It can go from a nightclub to special event to corporate and cover the gamut of whatever they need to accomplish.”

The Axon serves Christie LX450 XGA LCD projectors that throw images on the walls left and right above the DJ booth at the mezzanine level, as well as plasma screens above the bar. “A Crestron control system switches everything video, all through an Extron matrix, so we can change sources, including cable and satellite TV, as well as the Axon and two DVD players,” says Lieberman. “All goes through this matrix, so using the Crestron system, we can send whatever source you want to whatever screen you want. The Axon is controlled through the console, but all other video is through the matrix system.”

SJ Lighting supplied the theatrical lighting package and video gear for Shrine. Electricians in-house installed the gear, with Dave Thisius of SJ lighting supervising the structural part of the lighting installation, including the winches and trussing. Thisius was also there at a critical moment at the beginning of the installation process. “The day after I ordered the truss — all custom lengths — I got a call from Dave that it was all the wrong length,” says Lieberman. “They redlined the document onsite and made new measurements, and thankfully, I was able to catch Total Structures before they rolled out all that aluminum, and we changed the dimensions of the system just in time.”

Having the sound system integrated into the lighting truss also poses some challenges to onsite operations. “The sound guys don't want the system moving around throughout the night, but we sometimes need to bring our parts in for service and maintenance,” says Lieberman. “The sound system is tuned and focused very specifically for the room and for a specific height off the floor, so they have to put it back to its original position also. The nuances of the system are very specific, and each operator has to be aware of that. Overall, though, this place looks great and sounds great.”

With Shrine up and running, Lieberman has no shortage of gigs coming up. He is working on a venue in Armenia, two clubs in Hollywood, a bar/restaurant in Las Vegas, with another possibly in Mexico, two hotels in New York, and a bar in Aspen. Even in this economy, he says, “I've never been so busy in my life.”

Shrine GEAR

1 MA Lighting grandMA light

1 Crestron CP2E Control System

1 High End Systems Axon Media Server

1 Extron MAV Plus 88 HDA 8×8 Component Video Matrix with Stereo Audio

4 Christie LX450 XGA LCD 4,500-Lumen Projector

11 Elation Design LED 36

4 Elation Octopod 80

4 Martin Professional Atomic Color

12 Martin Professional MAC 250 Krypton
4 Martin Professional MAC 250 Wash
4 Martin Professional Atomic 3000 DMX
40 ETC Source Four[®] PAR EA
2 Doug Fleenor Design DMX512 Isolated Splitter/Amplifier
8 Pathway Connectivity Modular Receptacle
4 Skjonberg Controls Custom Winch
12 Total Structures Custom Truss Sections and Pipe Attachments
12 TMB Grapple Motor Point Attachments
1 Jem ZR33 Hazer Hi-Mass 1,500W
2 Denon DNV-310 DVD Player with RS232
1 Crestron Isys Lectern-Style 15" Touchscreen

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