

Push the boat out

'The Venue', a theatre on board a glitzy riverboat casino, incorporates many features designed to enable its multifunctional use

Below and top right: The Venue, the Horseshoe Casino's multipurpose entertainment centre

Bottom right: The Venue's lobby

When Harrah's Entertainment announced in 2006 plans for a US\$0.5 billion expansion of the Horseshoe Casino in Hammond, Indiana, USA, its vision was to take entertainment in the area to a new level. This aim was met in August this year, with the launch of the newly expanded 32,500m² riverboat casino and its high-profile entertainment centre, The Venue. The project was designed by Scéno Plus, creators of the renowned Colosseum at Caesar's Palace, and Bellagio Theatre in Las Vegas.

Scéno Plus designed The Venue on the fourth floor of the riverboat, and completed the construction in a year. The entertainment centre

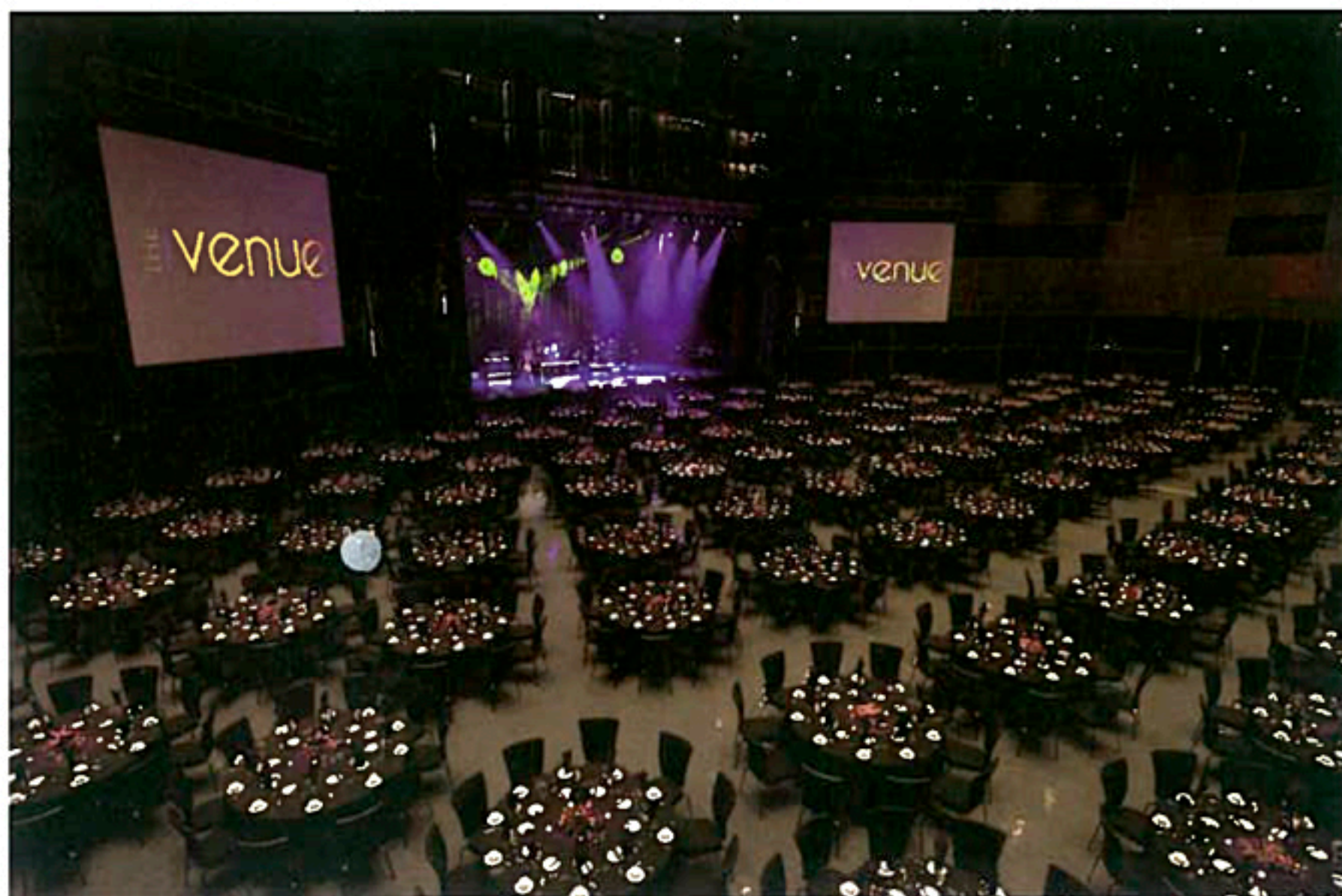
is by far the country's largest showroom built on a floating vessel.

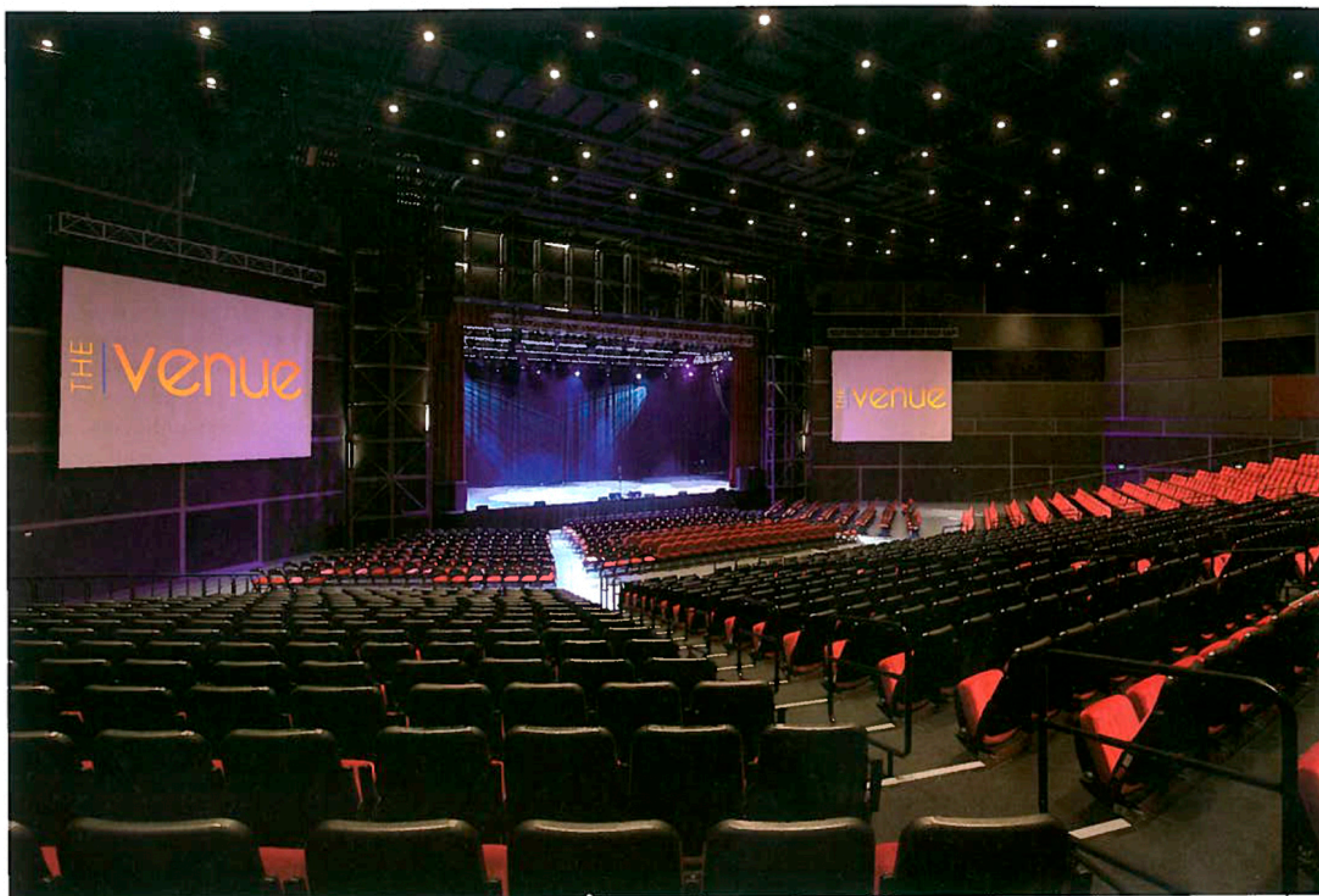
"Building a 2,500-seat venue on the upper floor of a floating vessel represents quite a challenging project for any design firm. The most basic details, like loading facilities and larger spans, all needed to be approached in innovative ways, in close collaboration with naval engineers, architects and the selected design and construction teams," says Benoit Panaccio, who designed the theatre.

Headline acts

The 8,360m² showroom provides a new landmark for Hammond, as it has started to attract unprecedented headline talents. "This compares to anything Las Vegas has," says Kevin Kline, vice-president and assistant general manager of the Horseshoe Casino. "We wanted to bring that big entertainment to the Chicago area. Now we can accommodate headliners with fairly simple set-ups, and those with more full-blown theatrics." Opening performances on 8 and 9 August by Bette Midler and The Smashing Pumpkins sold out.

The highly diversified programming of The Venue is made possible by the facility's unique flexibility. Equipped with 1,200 telescopic seats, it can undergo complete turnover, in less than two hours, from a fully seated configuration to a standing crowd set-up for more than 3,300 guests, including the balcony and suites. Other events scheduled for the coming months include sporting events, corporate banquets, poker tournaments and exhibits.





All pics Kevin Beswick, People Places & Things Photographics

Every piece of equipment is designed to support its multipurpose calling. The 30m x 18m stage and its 18m x 9m proscenium arch can accommodate any large-scale musical and theatrical production. The rigging infrastructure, covering both the stage and floor areas, is flexible and strong to support heavy structural loads. The Venue has also been equipped with removable risers, so that a 102m² proscenium stage area can be added when required.

Special effects

Production systems were designed with some leading brands, notably Ross Vision Quattro, Digital Projection, ETC, Yamaha, Meyer Sound Clair Brothers Systems and Vari-Lite. Audio-visual equipment includes three giant HD screens that combine lighting with multi-layered video projections to create a wide range of special effects. To ensure the highest quality in sound, acoustics are supported by a highly efficient and versatile audio system, capable of substituting or completing the most demanding touring technical requirements. Meanwhile, sound



absorbing materials were installed on virtually every surface of the showroom.

Local enthusiasm

Another feature that contributed to the enthusiasm of local critics during the opening is a three-level lobby, with walls featuring LED pixels and immersive lighting, which was designed to greet guests with a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Additionally, a 3,500ft² area hosts six VIP suites, with three rows of seats featuring couches and plasma televisions for a high-end and intimate entertainment experience.

Designing multipurpose entertainment venues is always a rather complex undertaking, having to meet the demands of different types of performances. "With critics raving about the opening weekend performances and Alice Cooper describing The Venue as 'one of the best sounding rooms I have ever played', we can proudly say we brilliantly took up the challenge," adds Panaccio. ■

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