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Christien Methot: Bringing Buried Treasures to Light



Christien Methot

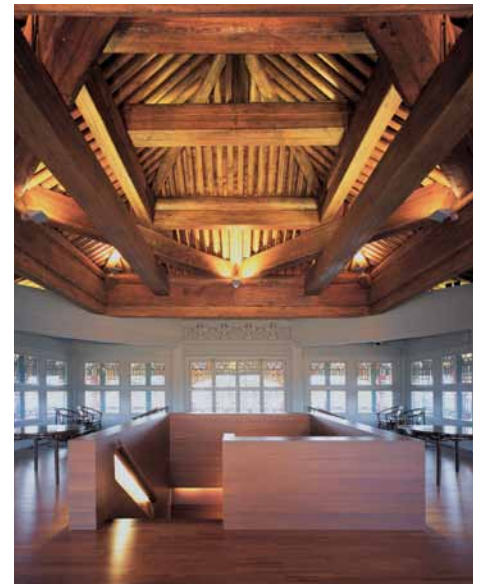
For more than twenty years, Christien Methot has created the ambience for commercial and residential architectural spaces, theater, broadcast, music, film, retail, art, fashion, and corporate events. Methot's work has illuminated the Forbidden City in Beijing, shadowed historic pirate coves, and even brightened some of the biggest stars in the figure skating world.

Methot worked for several years as a freelance lighting designer for theater in New York City after receiving his bachelor of fine arts from Purchase College State University of New York. He formed design one corporation, a lighting design and production firm in New York, in 1996. His clients include Disney, Paramount Pictures, Target, and Tommy Hilfiger, and his work has been featured in magazines such as *InStyle*, *Lighting & Sound America*, *Projection*, *Lights and Staging News (PLSN)*, *New York Magazine*, and *The West Australian*. Design one corporation won an Illuminating Engineering Society Illumination Award of Merit in 2009 for its work on the St. James Church in Manhattan and has been recognized for excellence in many other projects.

Growing up in New Haven, Connecticut, Methot was lucky enough to realize his calling at a young age. "It was liberating to know what I wanted to do that early," he says. He worked closely with the New Haven community theater scene and met his mentor, Jamie Burnett, the technical director at his fine arts high school. Methot worked as Burnett's assistant, helping to light projects all over New Haven, including cabarets, dance shows, and other performances. "He introduced me to a lot of the contacts that furthered my understanding of the arts in general," Methot explains. Being so close to Yale University was also a boon, and provided exposure to a variety of talented artists.

CASTING NEW LIGHT IN AN ANCIENT GARDEN

When a last minute change in staff gave Methot the invitation of a lifetime in 2004, he jumped on it. The staff of the Palace Museum, which oversees the 720,000-square-meter Forbidden City of Beijing, was planning the reconstruction of the five-building Jian Fu Garden section that had burned during the



Methot's light plots for the modern interior multipurpose spaces create ambience and elegance.

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Renovation of the 720,000-square-meter Forbidden City of Beijing includes replicas of 15th century lanterns fabricated from modern materials.

Palace Museum officials specified the buildings were to match the exact original specifications on the outside.



Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976. They wanted the buildings to match the exact original specifications on the outside, but gave the architect and Methot creative license to create their own space and ambience on the interior. For five weeks, which included time for the site survey, Methot created the lighting plots for an elegant and flexible multipurpose space. "It was an amazing process," he recalls. "Being in the Forbidden City of Beijing was surprisingly low key. We walked over to this fantastically old storeroom and there were all these lanterns from the 1400s there. We spent the better part of the day culling through these different lanterns and taking photos. It was gorgeous." Methot and his colleague simplified the lanterns' distinctive style and then crafted them out of modern materials, bringing centuries of history alive.

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Methot drew on his experience in lighting retail and theater, as well as 15 years experience with the Vectorworks Spotlight program, to illuminate the St. Augustine Pirate & Treasure Museum.

REVIVING THE PIRATES' LIFE

In another historic project, Methot helped illuminate the St. Augustine Pirate & Treasure Museum in St. Augustine, FL. Successful entrepreneur Pat Croce decided to relocate his museum from its former home in Key West, FL, and selected a new waterfront space along the historic thoroughfare that faces an old fort. St. Augustine is the oldest city in the U.S., and boasts a rich and varied history, rife with pirate stories. During the excavation of the new

site, the crew found several authentic pirate artifacts, which were added to the museum's collection—the largest pirate-inspired collection in the world, which also includes Blackbeard's blunderbuss musket and one of the two Jolly Roger flags in existence.

For Methot, the project drew on his experience in lighting retail, as well as in theater. "Those two worlds are on one hand technical and another very creative," he explains. With his expertise, Methot helps visitors experience the authentic world of pirates—the grittiness of 17th century pirate-infested Port Royal, Jamaica; the captain's musty private quarters; and the rustic main deck of a pirate ship. "For every different location, the lighting needed to be dramatic and needed to be unique to help transform the attendees of the museum into those different locations," says Methot.

A Vectorworks® software user for more than 15 years, Methot used the Vectorworks Spotlight program to create the plans. Since the project's construction manager used a different software program and the plans changed on a daily basis, Methot consistently imported the manager's drawings. "The fact that Vectorworks allowed me to continue working with the lighting drawing that I had developed while being able to bring in the changes from somebody else allowed me to easily keep up with the changes," he says. Working in a relatively small space with a tight deadline, this efficiency was key.

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Methot's choice of CAD software allowed him to lay out all stage components, including the enormous video screen and calculate its location based on lens size.

SKATING ON AIR

In his first foray as a production designer for broadcast television, Methot oversaw "The Caesars Tribute: A Salute to the Golden Age of American Skating," which took place at the Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City, NJ. It featured many of skating's greats, like Peggy Fleming, Scott Hamilton, Nancy Kerrigan, and others. After a waning budget changed the parameters for the program, Methot drew on his creativity, selecting rentable fabric sculpture pieces and rentable furniture that were more environmentally- and budget-friendly. "We were taught in design class in college to pick the perfect peach on the perfect platter—don't go overboard," he says. "We want to be there in support of the show, not *be* the show."

Methot used his CAD software to lay out all of the various components on the stage, including the large focal point, the video screen. With the Vectorworks projector tools, he calculated the screen size and the projector's location based on his lens sizes. "It's a very accurate tool for figuring out projector lens throws. I knew exactly where to park the scissors lift...to be able to do rear projection for the show," says Methot. And he didn't mind making changes. "When they said, 'Oh how about this?' the answer was, 'No problem. Give me an hour.' I feel so comfortable with the software, I just say, 'Give me an hour,' as opposed to a week. I have been using the program for so long and the tools are so intuitive that I am able to create almost anything." Methot believes that working in 3D has also moved his business forward. "Now I present every project

in 2D and 3D. The 3D presentation definitely helps streamline the process as far as people being able to decide if they like the choices I'm presenting or not. The great thing about Spotlight with Renderworks® is that the programs allow me to think as a lighting designer and get realistic lighting as part of my renderings. I think realistic lighting really makes or breaks a good rendering," he says.

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Methot's philosophy is simple. He focuses on his clients and takes the time to hear their challenges. "I think the key is to listen. A lot of times I feel designers bring a lot of big ideas to the table and they're usually their ideas and that's all fine and good, but the reality is that in lighting design and production design we're still in a service industry; we still need to be listening to our clients and really trying to very specifically solve the problem at hand for them," Methot explains. Once he understands the issues he can work to find the right solution. "The perfect peach on the perfect platter. That's something that has stuck with me for 20 years after college," says Methot. He has found the sacred balance of enhancing spaces and people without overpowering them. The perfect peach on the perfect platter, indeed.

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