Joseph Jeup Inc., a Michigan-based couture furniture designer, is redefining luxury and craftsmanship in the furniture industry.
When the Capitol Theatre Building was completed in 1928, it not only epitomized the atmospheric style that would come to define John Eberson’s architectural career, but also was the largest theater in Flint, Michigan and among the Butterfield Theatre chain’s most lavish. Its buff brick façade was decorated with glazed terra cotta, window surrounds, sill courses, finial-topped terra cotta piers, spandrel panels, and roofline cresting. On the interior, the proscenium dazzled with acanthus moldings, pedimented niches, and arcades, as the auditorium transported patrons from East Second Street to an outdoor amphitheater nestled in an Italian landscape. Inspired by 15th Century Hispano-Italian style and Mediterranean architectural elements, Eberson combined performance and functionality into an ornate, grand theatrical design, and its significance led it to be listed among the National Register of Historic Places in Michigan in 1985.

Throughout its illustrious lifetime, the Capitol Theatre has served as a center for arts and entertainment for the city of Flint from its first three-act Vaudeville show, feature film, sound motion picture, and cinemacope film; to live performances and concerts by popular musicians such as Ray Charles and AC/DC. While Capitol Theatre shuttered its doors in 1996 and sat dormant for nearly two decades, a multidisciplinary group of organizations, architects, designers, and stakeholders have once again restored the cultural and artistic venue to its original luster.

“I’m a preservationist and an architect. My job on a lot of these historic buildings is trying to define what design meant to the original architect and the original designer,” said Matthew Jennings, AIA, historic preservation leader and associate with DLR Group|Westlake Reed Leskosky. “Eberson was working to build these beautiful atmospheric theaters; he wanted to extend the theatrical experience before and after the shows and across his entire building. Everything we did, everything we upgraded, and everything we fixed was trying to bring his vision back to the splendor it was the day it opened.”

DLR Group is an integrated design firm providing architectural, engineering, interior, planning, and building optimization services for a diverse group of public and private sector clients. Since its establishment in 1966 as an architecture and engineering practice, DLR Group has since developed into an award-winning, global design firm with nearly 30 office locations. In 2016 DLR Group merged with Westlake Reed Leskosky, a Cleveland, Ohio-based architectural firm founded in 1905 by Abram Garfield and known for its legacy in performing and cultural arts, and historic preservation.

“We do a lot of theatrical work and a lot of performing arts spaces, both historic theaters and new theaters,” Jennings said. “I’ve been the Director of Historic Preservation for [Westlake Reed Leskosky] for 10 years and I have had a little bit of involvement in a...
The Capitol Theatre initiative was spearheaded by lead partners The Whiting and Uptown Reinvestment Corporation with major grant funding valued at $15 million from The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, which is a Flint-based nonprofit philanthropic organization supporting programs throughout the country. The project also received support from The Hagerman Foundation, an organization committed to the revitalization of Flint; the Michigan Economic Development Corporation with a $5.5 million performance-based grant; and The Whiting's historic tax credit investment through the Michigan Strategic Fund's Michigan Community Revitalization Program; and is expected to generate $3.7 million in federal historic tax credits.

The restoration was led by the design team of DLR Group|Westlake Reed Leskosky and The Christmas Company, and comprised a number of goals supporting the overall vision of not only preserving, restoring, and updating an architectural artifact of Flint's social, cultural, and built landscape, but also serving as a catalyst for economic revitalization and as a platform for local and national performances.

Jennings noted in recognizing the theater would become a multi-use facility for performing arts such as movies, live comedic acts, and concerts, as well as public spaces available for rent, the design team approached the restoration with the idea the building would serve the community in the broadest way possible.

"There are some modern theater facilities in Flint, but this was an excellent opportunity to have more availability of these resources to the community," Jennings said. "Plus, the fact it is surrounded and ringed by retail opportunities and commercial spaces on the upper floors is a great opportunity to bring more life, more activity to downtown and help reinsatiate it and bring it back to life."

While there were a number of challenges—as with any historic preservation project—one of the initial concerns with the Capitol Theatre project dealt with the stage line set, which had been designed to carry 500 pounds rather than the modern expectations of being able to manage nearly 2,200 pounds.

"This theater goes all the way back to Vaudeville days. It didn't even have a sound system when it opened. A lot of the old buildings were never designed to handle the weight and the work of a modern theater," Jennings said. "One of our big concerns—any time one of these theaters is going back into use—is making sure the infrastructure of the building is going to be able to handle all of the modern needs."

"Underneath the theater, the team also discovered a large amount of earth had slowly eroded throughout the course of nearly a century due to a broken water main. Jennings noted from day to night as the performance lighting effects twinkled like stars, clouds scrolling across the ceiling and LED lighting effects resembling stars."

"One of Eberson's calling cards as an architect for atmospheres—he was basically the architect who invented the concept—was painting a unique reflective blue color that pops up under various colors. As you're moving toward show time, it becomes darker and the stars come out," Jennings said. "It's a very theatrical approach to entertaining people in a subtle way before a show and to let people know it's almost time." With major restoration work completed, the 1,360-seat Capitol Theatre opened for the first time in 20 years late 2017 with a soft opening performance, once again setting the stage for a rich piece of Flint's historic and cultural landscape.

"It is the only historic theater of its type left in Flint," Jennings said. "All of the others are gone."