

AUGUST 2015

Interiors & Sources[®]

Excellence
in Commercial
Design

THE **STATE** OF DESIGN



how I sourced it



A BEACON OF HOPE

MRD Lighting honors Pier A Harbor House's past while setting its course toward the 21st century.

We spoke with Mike Riotta of MRD design-build lighting company about their amazing new project, Pier A Harbor House, a multi-purpose culinary and events destination down in Battery Park City, N.Y. We see clearly now how lighting can take a project beyond just rejuvenated to achieve the ultimate in elegance with pieces that are classic, locally sourced and fabricated, and at the cutting edge of technology, all at the same time!

INTERIORS & SOURCES: Tell us a little bit about the history of Pier A.

MIKE RIOTTO: Since opening in 1886, Pier A—which is located near the southern end of Manhattan—has served as the headquarters for the city's harbor police, fire department, and a beacon of welcome for European Ambassadors traveling to Ellis Island. Pier A was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and was designated a New York City landmark in 1977.

The pier was expanded in 1900 and again in 1919 with a clock installed in the pier's tower as a memorial to 116,000 U.S. servicemen

who died during World War I. This iconic clock tower continues to stand over the harbor as part of Pier A's restaurant and bar.

And now for the first time in 127 years, the three-story project has opened its doors to the public. It houses bars, restaurants, and a top-floor event space with stunning views of Ellis Island and the Hudson. We envisioned the Pier as a docked ship and designed the lighting accordingly. The lower floor represents the utilitarian spaces, like the engine room, while the upper floor represents the crew's nest and captain's quarters. We also designed and built several custom and architectural lighting fixtures to give the building a unique New York City identity.

I&S: How did your lighting choices help enliven its past and brighten its future?

MR: We kept with Pier A's maritime history. We really tapped into our knowledge of the marine industry to inform and define the space. For example, we used red and green markers, always found on ships as navigational lights, to help define the Long Bar area and create a wayfinding feature.

My personal background is in scenic and theatrical lighting design and I wanted to use that experience to make the featured lighting appear dramatic, but instead



of using “sets,” use authentic equipment to build the fixtures. For example, the gauge lights featured over the bar are very theatrical and reinforce the ship theme but everything is vintage using working pieces, not just facades.

We were able to bring the space into the future by using the latest lighting technology in period-relevant and respected ways to update the vintage fixtures. One of the best examples includes the gauge lights over the Long Bar. We found 150 original gauges from around the U.S., all made in the U.S., that date as far back as the mid-1800s and updated them using 4-color LED light strips with controls. On an interesting note, as we were collecting the gauges and logging each one into a master spreadsheet with the year made, who made them, who they were made for, serial number, etc., we noticed around the 75th gauge that all were made in the U.S., which is really rare. We took it one step further and decided that all materials used in this huge custom light needed to be U.S.-made, from the black iron pipe, the copper wiring, LEDs, the hardware, and more. The gauges also came in a variety of materials including copper, brass, silver-plated, bronze, and iron.

didn't add anything that wasn't relevant. We were authentic to all of the decorative lighting, all of the lighting that is visible to guests. The ceiling pendant in the Commissioner's Bar is the original fixture and we completely rewired it using LED technology creating a very high-tech fixture behind the glass. The fixture is made of teak, bronze, brass, copper, steel, and glass. To the naked eye, it just looks like a beautiful light in the all-teak bar, but behind what you see is something completely different.

Another example is the vintage search light in the front of the Long Bar, which is one of the first things you see upon entry. This was the last original search light from the building and was just lying in the corner on the job site. All others were broken, stolen, or lost. We decided to repurpose this search light by working with a millworker to freshen it up and put it at the very center of the bar. **I&S**

I&S: How do you make the functional, fabulous?

MR: We respected the building and its history for what it was as a whole and



See additional photography from this project in our digital edition at interiorsandsources.com.



ABOVE + BELOW The Oyster Bar, featuring Tom Dixon pendant lights above, going across the bar.

BELOW The Long Hall features exposed piping, reminiscent of a ship's engine room.

OPPOSITE This view of the Long Hall highlights its navigation lights—green means right or starboard side and red means left or port side.



THE
LONG HALL



how I sourced it

A great view of the Oyster Bar that features its "onion" lanterns made of handblown glass in Sandwich, MA by Sandwich Lantern.







CLOCKWISE FROM TOP A refurbished historic pendant sits atop The Commissioner's Bar with diffused RGBW light panels; this brass rail system hides a concealed linear LED; dual-headed brass fixtures grace bar tops; 130 antique nautical gauge LED lights dance above the Long Hall bar.

OPPOSITE The Harrison Room is a lounge that serves as a great example of custom millwork and creative engineering. Made entirely of cherry and mahogany wood, the room features backlit stained glass panels in the ceiling from Michael Davis Glass.



