

River Center theatre to undergo \$18.1 million renovation project

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Architectural sketches of what the Raising Canes River Center Theatre for the Performing Arts should look like in 2019, after it undergoes \$18.1 million in renovations. The updates include an elevated lobby entrance, the implementation of an outdoor terrace area and a redesigned seating area in the theatre. Courtesy of Post Architects

The Raising Cane's River Center Theatre for the Performing Arts will receive its first update in 40 years with an \$18.1 million renovation project.

The River Center partnered with Post Architects in Baton Rouge and HMS Architects of New Orleans to create the redesign of the theatre, said SMG Baton Rouge general manager Michael Day. SMG Baton Rouge manages the River Center.

Construction is estimated to begin on July 1, 2018, Day said. The renovation is expected to take 12 to 16 months.

The redesign will create breathtaking changes to the theatre, which is located on River Road downtown. Architects plan to elevate the lobby so guests can view the Mississippi River, Old State Capitol and parts of Repentance Park, said Post Architects project manager Lisa Nice.

"The design will bring a spark to the area and really activate the space in and around the River Center," Nice said. "The entire design is driven by improving the customer experience from start to finish."

Nice's proposition of an angled entrance will allow guests to relish in a panoramic view of the river from the second and third floors. The implementation of an outdoor terrace area on the second floor is also in the works.

Updating the theatre's current continental seating design is the most anticipated part of the project, Nice said. Continental seating, or continuous rows of seats with no center aisle, was a popular style when the theatre was originally built. However, the inconvenience of not being able to easily get in or out of the aisle demanded for a redesign, Day said.

"There will be a lot of aisles making it much easier to get in and out the seats," Day said. "There will also be expanded concession stands, bathrooms and even elevators to the balcony and upper floors."

Handicapped patrons will now be able to get to upper levels of the theatre, which is a huge improvement from the original design. Fire codes will also be updated to current ADA standards.

As for the wide variety of performances the theatre hosts, ranging from concerts to the inauguration of the Baton Rouge mayor, current shows will be held at the River Center arena with a cut down stage. Until the renovations occur the theatre will remain vacant.

"It's a stunning looking building for downtown," said Day. "The Theatre of Performing Arts will once again be the top facility in Baton Rouge after this."

http://www.lsunow.com/daily/river-center-theatre-to-undergo-million-renovation-project/article_3d014bc4-9e20-11e7-82c5-e7cc004e6763.html