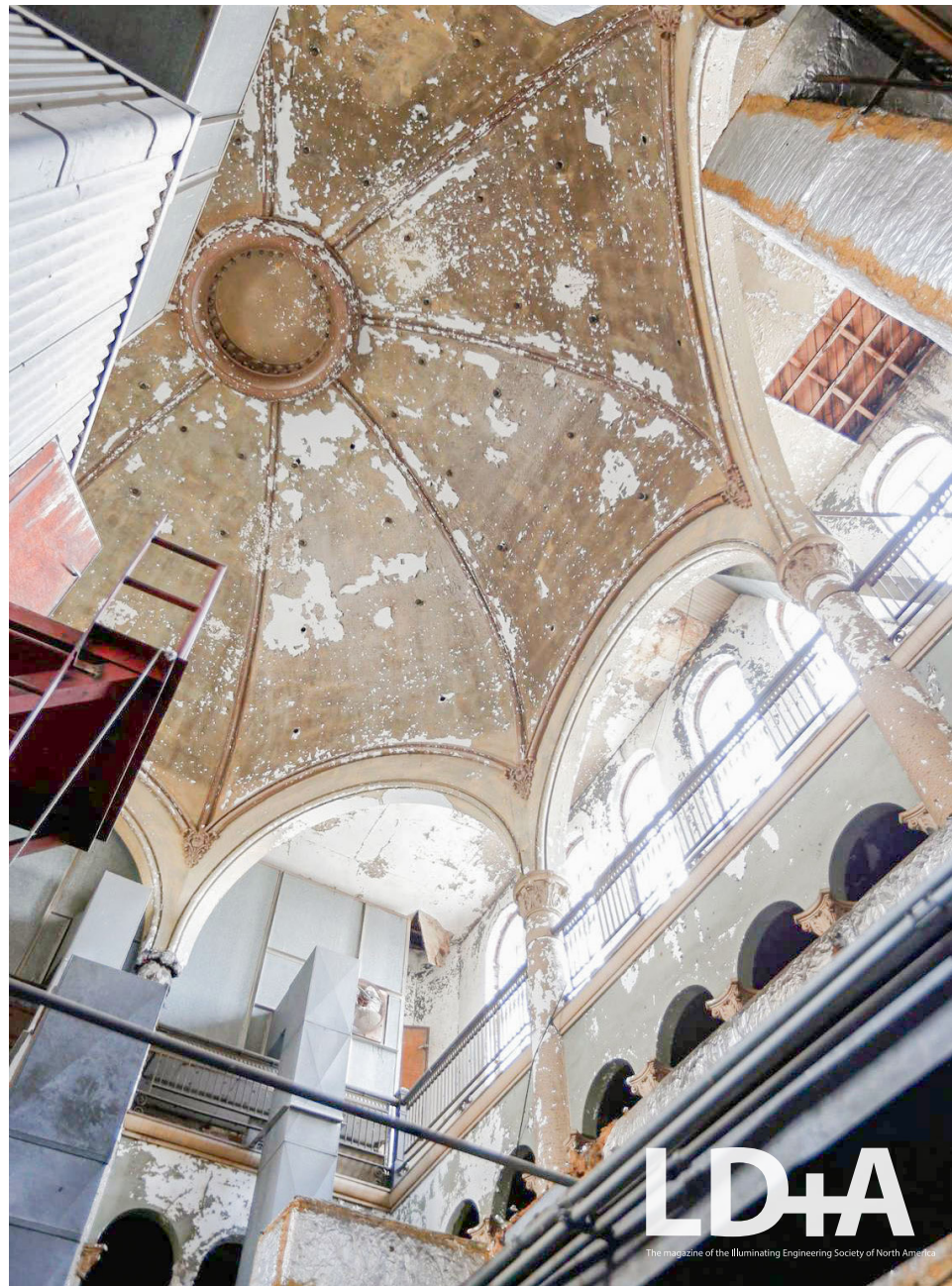


# COURTHOUSE IS BACK IN SESSION

What's a lighting designer living in London doing in a place like Lexington, Kentucky? Helping bring an historic building back to life, is all.

By Paul Tarricone



It's a long way from London to Lexington, KY—4,000 miles to be precise—but good design travels well. Just ask New York City architect Deborah Berke Partners, who enlisted the services of London lighting designer Illuminationworks for the restoration of Kentucky's historic Fayette County Courthouse. In 2018, the vacant building re-emerged after a four-year mixed-use development featuring a bar and restaurant, event space, and offices.

It turns out the distance between the project site and lighting design firm was no barrier to success. In fact, it made all the sense in the world. Illuminationworks founder and creative director Chad Rains explains: "I lived in New York City for nine years prior to moving to London in 2001, and I've been working with Deborah Berke Partners since 1998," he says. "In January 2016, we were in Lexington for a week to focus on and commission our project, 21c Museum Hotel, which is across the street from the courthouse," he says. "Deborah Berke Partners are the architects for all nine 21c Museum Hotel projects we have worked on to date. We were both in town, and DBP asked us to attend a site visit during that week, and we got involved in the courthouse project."

The New York-to-London-to-Lexington connection was more direct than the courthouse's circuitous route to restoration. Completed in 1899, the 48,000 ft<sup>2</sup> building functioned as a courthouse until 2001. The Lexington History Museum then occupied the space until the building was closed in 2012 due to lead paint and other environmental issues. The watershed moment for the courthouse, however, occurred in the 1960s when the building was renovated to provide more space for the courts. At that time, a fourth floor was added and a grand marble staircase was removed. The resplendent rotunda—or "dome room" as it was called by the project team—was a casualty of the court expansion. "Incredibly," says Rains, "the beautifully detailed dome room was closed off to served as an enclosure for the HVAC system. The dome was in poor condition and only half visible due to all the air conditioning equipment."



Restoring the luster to the rotunda quickly became the centerpiece of the project. The design team was able to access 80-year-old photographs showing the dome in its original state. The photos revealed a pattern of incandescent point sources that accentuated the curvature of the dome. These were refitted with new sockets and exposed LED lamps. Individual miniature uplights also accent each column in the upper gallery colonnade. Linear uplight integrated into the lower wall adds ambient lighting at the scale of visitors and creates a visual link to the more contemporary areas within the building. With renovation complete, the dome room now serves as an event space.

**THE DESIGNER** | Chad Rains is founder and creative director of Illuminationworks in London.