

Outside OPINION

*CinemaExpo International, the annual Amsterdam-hosted jamboree for exhibitor-distributors and service providers was back in town recently. But does its ancillary and often well-attended trade show have much new to offer the cinema designer? **Bill Chew** presents that designer's view.*



I must confess that while, for the last seven or so years, I've been a fervent attendee of CEI, I mainly use the occasion to network rather than to undertake pure architectural research. But this year I took a more critical stance, going in search of products and materials the cinema designer would need in tackling his (or her) daunting task. So how did the Fair measure up?

As a cinema designer the first thing to ensure is that your theatre geometry, proportions, picture size and sightlines, seating arrangement and projection room design are in good order. Starting with the auditorium, among your first decisions will be whether the seating will be on a raked or stepped floor – bearing in mind the significant height difference. Moreover, with your design finalised you'll need to determine the products available for kitting out the shell and foyer so as to create that unique design for your client. As auditoria walls generally comprise blockwork or plasterboard and insulation on metal studs, interior walls need facing with good cladding and acoustic materials. Products such as Decorcord (a cost-effective fibre-bonded ribbed wallcovering) has the advantage of being directly applicable on a sound and dust-free substrate. Alternatively, Pro-stretch is an economical site-built fabric acoustic treatment available in an infinite colour range.

This year I detected noticeably fewer international seating manufacturers relative to previous years, and this may be due in part to the general slowdown in European multiplex construction. But while a good variety of seating to suit all tastes and budgets is essential, the

bewildering range available today dictates that choosing the right seat can involve as much art as science. In addition to price, comfort, style, and robustness of construction, of course, it's the seat dimensions that become critical in maximising auditorium capacity.


“Can trade shows be improved? I believe so, and starting with a more holistic approach to cinema design”

The projection booth, which must accommodate all the usual equipment: 35mm projectors, film transporters such as platters and towers, digital processors, amps. etc to create the fully-functional gallery suite. In addition to industry heavyweights from Italy and America, one relative CEI newcomer, from Valencia in Spain, displayed a range of compact and portable equipment. One such system, measured just 1370mm from the lens front to the rear of the lamphouse – something to

consider where the depth of the 'box (and particularly in refurb. work) becomes critical.

The Disability Discrimination Act became law in 1996, and all public venues – cinemas included – must meet full compliance by October 2004. Exhibitors therefore must ensure no discrimination either to wheelchair users, the partially-sighted or hearing-impaired. Respecting the latter, infra-red/induction loops have been around for some time and one system, the Starsound 600 Series enjoys advantage over the induction loop in that where design may be wanting, sound leakage between screens does not occur.

And, finally, the cinema front-of-house: the foyer, concessions stand and even the cinema entrance itself in which each must be highly visible, while needing to accommodate the greatest numbers of patrons at all times. Concessions stands must be attractive and efficient, electronic data display systems clear, comprehensive and yet uncomplicated, while computerised ticketing able to cope with a host of sale and stock control functions. And here representation I'd felt to be particularly good.

Whilst always a pleasure to catch up with colleagues at trade shows, I felt the opportunity to 'shop around' in a relaxed atmosphere was good. CEI, in particular, I'd always rated for its general compactness and exhibitor relevance, unlike some Fairs which can be too big, unwieldy or disparate. But is there room for improvement? I think there is, and perhaps a more holistic approach to cinema design might be considered as a future theme. And by this, I mean the exhibiting of a broader mix of materials, products, services and installations which now comprise today's contemporary and highly-serviced cinema. 

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