

# FIREHOUSE CENTER FOR THE ARTS

## NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS



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ACOUSTICS CONSULTANT:	Cavanaugh Tocci Associates, Inc.
AUDIO SYSTEMS / SOUND & COMMUNICATIONS:	Cavanaugh Tocci Associates, Inc. David H. Kaye Audio Consultant
OWNER:	City of Newburyport, MA Soc. for the Dev. of the Arts and Humanities, Newburyport
ARCHITECT:	Schwartz/Silver Architects
THEATER CONSULTANT:	Robert Long
HISTORIC PRESERVATION:	Preservation Technology Associates
CONSTRUCTION COST:	\$1.75 Million
COMPLETION DATE:	1991

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The historic building now known as the Firehouse Center for the Arts was originally built as a market house and lyceum by the citizens of Newburyport in 1823. Daniel Webster and Ralph Waldo Emerson are reported to have lectured there. It was converted into the Newburyport central fire station and was in use from the mid 1800s until 1980 when it shut down.

The town debated the next use of the old firehouse; whether it should become an educational center for the nearby wildlife refuge, or a waterfront hotel complex. Citizens were highly protective of the old market, having just recovered from a long battle to restore rather than replace the valuable old structures of downtown. The decision was made to restore the structure as a center for the arts and public events through a cooperative effort by the public and private sectors.

The Society for the Development of Arts and Humanities of Greater Newburyport came forward with an exciting new plan for a multi-purpose community center. Respecting both the public and historic aspects of the building, the society's design called for a creative arrangement of community, commercial, and performing arts spaces. Following its tentative designation in August 1985, the society held extensive discussions with local citizens, potential users, and professional consultants to refine the building plan. The concept that was pulled together contained a mix of dedicated and programmable spaces, the dedicated ones to include:

- the 200-seat lecture, performing arts, and conference center
- a 2,400-square-foot multilevel restaurant
- municipal office spaces, and meeting rooms
- a viewing tower and historic interpretive display
- a senior citizens center, a public information center
- display space for local arts and crafts

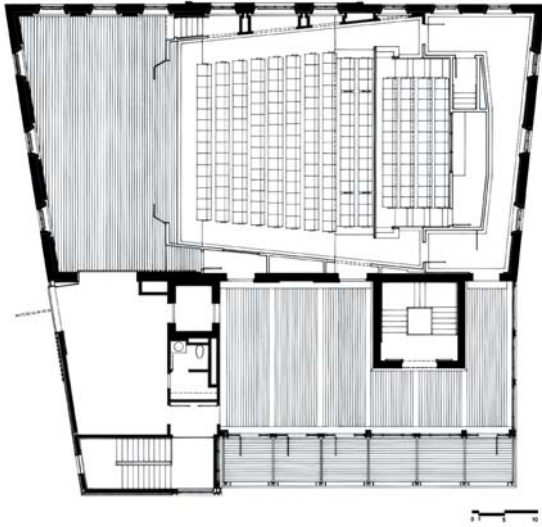
Inside, the Firehouse is a thoroughly modern theater, suitable for live drama, films, lectures, or music. The steeply raked seats are distributed between two tiers enabling each member of the audience to have unobstructed sight and hearing lines to the stage. The new theater blends the original structure with the newer elements while retaining the distinct identities of each. Architectural details like the exposed wood beams and arch-top windows remind the audience of the different roles the building has played over the years. The original acoustical design of the theater called for reflectors hung between the beams, but because of the small volume of the space and the desire to keep the beam space uncluttered, the scheme was abandoned. It was determined that the sloped, gabled ceiling surfaces provided adequate adequate natural reinforcement and the beams provided additional, desirable acoustic scattering.

The Firehouse Center has become a hallmark of local culture and arts, drawing patrons from the local communities as well as a large tourist crowd in the spring, summer, and fall. Programming is broad-based, and includes dance, music, theater, an art gallery, and a school show series. Programming includes an open mic night for new talent, a Sunday morning family series, a new works festival for New England writers, and even the Newby Theater Awards Ceremony to recognize excellence in local theater. Comments on listening conditions for its various uses have been favorable from the outset.

The Firehouse Center for the Arts has also won several architectural design awards including: the American Institute of Architects, National Honor Award; the AIA New England Regional Council Merit Award; and Boston Society of Architects, Honor Award.

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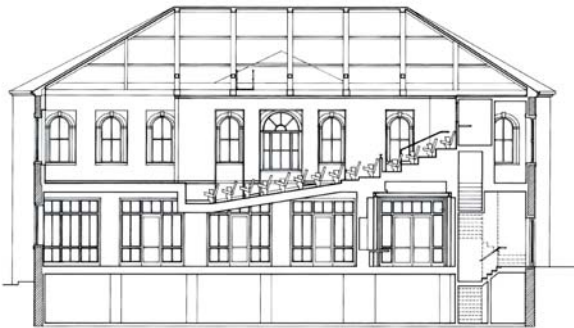
NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS



MAIN FLOOR PLAN



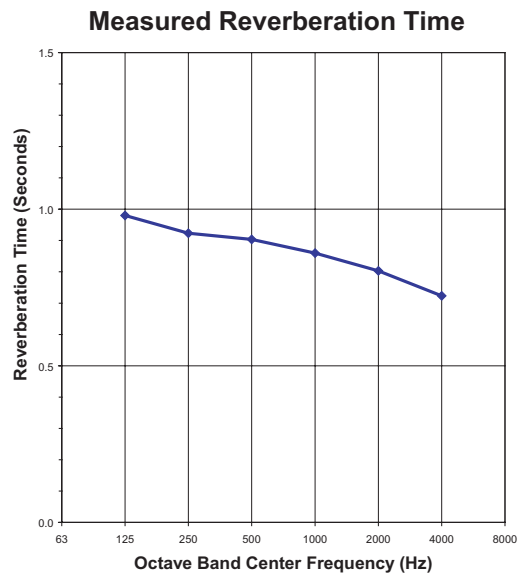
VIEW TOWARD STAGE



LONGITUDINAL SECTION



INTERIOR VIEW



VIEW TOWARD SEATING AREA