

Welcome to the Back Stage.

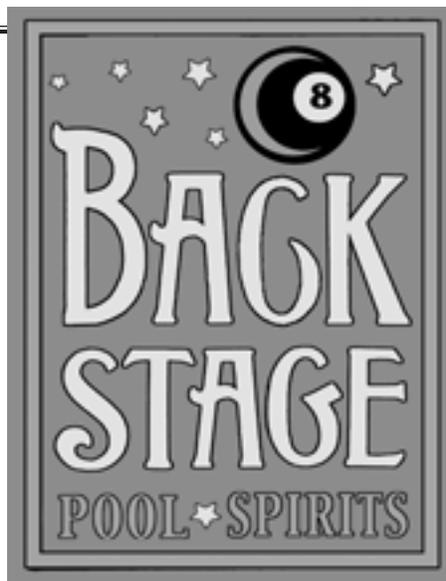
For years, this cavernous space, which reaches an altitude that still may be the highest in Portland's Southeast district, was never meant to be seen by the watchful eyes of countless audiences on the other side of the proscenium. On performance nights, it was a place of orchestrated pandemonium, the nerve center for the machinations of the Bagdad's vaudeville productions: lights, sound effects, curtains, sets, backdrops, and acres of rope, rigging and catwalks.

Sammy Davis, Jr. danced on this stage; Mercedes unfurled her exotic fluorescent dance magic here; Tippy the Wonder Dog wowed audiences with his tricks; and untold numbers of jugglers, xylophonists and impersonators rounded out the Bagdad's quarter-century of live vaudeville performances. Every bill was an amalgam of enormous talent, the bizarre and the mundane, all packaged together into productions that traveled the nation, from one town to the next.



The grand Bagdad Theater just after its opening in 1927.

Around the U.S., vaudeville had been dealt a deathblow with the advent of "talkies" in 1927, the year the Bagdad opened. Amazingly the Bagdad remained a stop on the national vaudeville circuit until 1949 (with only local talent shows and sporadic stage programs



persisting into the '50s).

In the mid 1970s, an inspired Roger Paulsen of Moyer Theaters resurrected the Bagdad's darkened back stage, transforming the space into an art house-type theater called—what else—The Back Stage Theater. Upon McMenamins' acquisition of the neighborhood landmark from Moyer Theaters in 1991, the Back Stage again went dark, until St. Paddy's Day 2006, that is.

Today, rather than movies, the Back Stage emphasizes the remarkable space itself and some new furnishings that have tales of their own to tell.

The back bar is truly a gem featuring mother-of-pearl inlay and years of colorful service. Hailing from Centralia, Washington, it was a mainstay of turn-of-the-century Mint Saloon, neighbor to what is now



In 1927, the Bagdad featured an orchestra pit and a grand pipe organ to accompany stage acts as well as silent films.



The entrance to the old Back Stage Theater on opening night, December 1972.

McMenamins Olympic Club, until Prohibition closed it down in 1916. The Olympic Club proprietors converted the vacated Mint into a much-expanded poolroom and moved its back bar into the Oly Club's refurbished café. Ninety years later, following

a kitchen expansion at the Olympic Club, the Mint's bar makes its debut here at the Back Stage.

Providing a compelling backdrop for the bar is one of the Bagdad's old vaudeville curtains. The Taj Mahal is portrayed, again a nod to the theater's pedigree. The curtain appropriately hangs where the stage originally opened into the theater.

Four showpiece pool tables and a snooker table offer recreation, competition and some great conversation starters. All are truly fetching pieces that appear to be long in the tooth. In fact, two of the pool tables are new construction crafted by that man of the cloth, Pat Sheehan. The third pool table, a 1920 beauty, first graced the Palace Theater-turned-saloon, an anchor of the Hugh O'Kane Building in Bend. Later, it migrated to the Bend Fire House where it continued to see much action. The fourth pool table hails from a saloon deep down in San Jose, California. The lone

snooker table—a highly prized Brunswick Reagent—harkens back to 1912 and the legendary Rialto pool hall in Portland. It lived there until a 1940s addition of a card room precipitated its removal to a private residence.

Lighting in the room runs the gamut from subtle and lyrical to epic and boisterous. Don't miss the constellation of colored lights seven stories above like a dreamy night's sky. And there's no way you could miss the enormous, opulent pair of chandeliers that shower light down on everything below. Originally part of the 1920s Oregon Bank Building in Portland, they were removed in the late 1990s.

Two storied neons add to the mix. The Jockey Club neon conjures images of pinball, pool, cheap drinks and tattoos, all hallmarks of this recently departed North Portland haunt. A patch of grass now occupies the club's former space, and all that remains—besides the memories—is this old sign. The other neon was recently retired from McMenamins Tavern & Pool, the venerable Northwest Portland pub that benefited from some additional elbow room and a fresh face in 2005. The old sign, dating back several decades, beckoned many a soul seeking conversation, pool and a beer.



The Back Stage Theater featured unique lay-down seating.

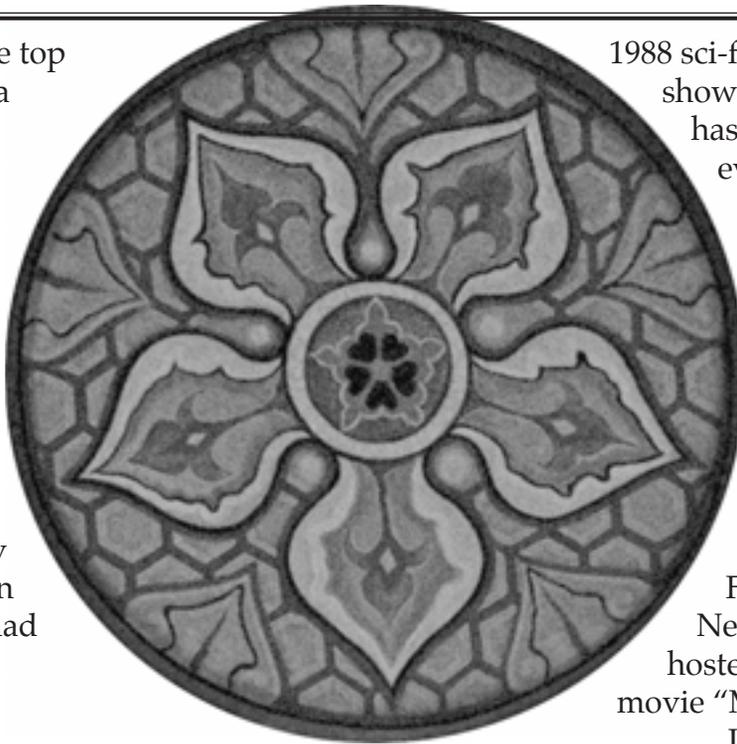
Of course, the most eye-catching and engaging piece of the Back Stage is the spectacular, 20x20-foot canvas hanging on the far wall. Done specifically for the 2006 renovation to chronicle the Bagdad's history, the painting was the collaborative work of artists Olivia Behm, Kolieha Bush, Joe Cotter, Lyle Hehn, Jennifer Joyce and Myrna Yoder. Reflecting the theater's original motif, the design borrows from Middle-Eastern traditions and features a mandala and various vignettes, similar to Persian miniatures that together comprise an

overlapping narrative.

The journey begins at the top central point with Myrna Yoder's depiction of the theater's 1927 grand opening. Complete with searchlights, screen actress Marilyn Mills and horse Beverley, a prop camel shipped from Hollywood and many local mucky-mucks mixing with excited theater goers, all dressed in their finery for the largest celebration the Hawthorne district had seen to date.

Flowing clockwise, next is Kolieha Bush's tribute to the vaudeville era, with depictions of the Mastin Trio (with Sammy Davis, Jr.), Tippy the Wonder Dog and others. For years, the Bagdad was the only eastside touring stage show venue and was host to some of the most colorful characters to ever perform on the national vaudeville circuit. Bush's portrayal celebrates their talent and, for those who lacked in that area, their energy and persistence.

"I have come here to chew bubblegum and kick ass. And I'm all out of bubblegum." That is one of the many Rowdy Roddy Piper-delivered lines the audience was treated to in the '90s when a special benefit screening of Piper's



1988 sci-fi gem "They Live" was shown. Of course, the Bagdad has hosted many such events and premieres over the years, featuring personal appearances by movie stars and directors. Artist Joe Cotter highlights the most outstanding of these in his section of the painting. Jack Nicholson and Louis Fletcher in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," Gus Vas Sant, who hosted the premiere of his movie "My Own Private Idaho," James "Scotty" Doohan and Nichelle "Uhura" Nichols in "Star Trek IV," Kitten Natividad from Russ Meyer's "Beyond the Valley of the Ultravixens" and Marlee Matlin from "What the #\$! Do We Know!?" (featuring the Bagdad!).

Olivia Behm commemorated the succession of owners/proprietors of the theater, each of whom overcame business challenges that kept the lights on and in some cases staved off the wrecking ball. This grand movie palace was the dream and construction of Rudolph Christman, who in his day was fondly called the Mayor of Hawthorne. Olivia portrays Christman here in a wizard's gown, holding blueprints and t-square. His wife soars behind him. Portland theater magnate Ted

JACK NICHOLSON
ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

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 DIRECTOR MILOS FORMAN
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Fantasy Films
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 Starring LOUISE FLETCHER and WILLIAM REDFIELD - Screenplay LAWRENCE HARBEN and BO GOLDMAN
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Gamble added the Bagdad to his theater enterprise in 1941. At the time, Gamble was widely known for his War Bond promotional activities. Gamble renovated and revived the Bagdad. Fifteen years later, longtime Portland theater man Paul Forsythe took over the place. Paul makes his cameo here with his '60s-era genie logo looking over his shoulder. In 1972,



Paul Forsythe and his mischievous '60s-era genie.

Larry Moyer, three years after leaving the beer-distributing business to take an active managerial role of the family theater business, acquired the Bagdad from Forsythe. Larry's children took active parts in the theater's operation, often working the concession stand. Here, Larry Sr. and Larry Jr., together with Ted Gamble's grandson, stand with what is now a favorite Bagdad combo: beer and popcorn.



Larry Moyer and son toast the Bagdad's survival.

Most recent in the line of Bagdad proprietors the McMenamens. While brothers Mike and Brian do make an appearance in Jenny Joyce's section of the mural, it's the longtime workers, regulars and events that take center stage. Here, Patty Early, Kevin Overby, Kevin Fisher, Sue Tognazzini, Karen Kerr and Kathy Fuller are portrayed, while Steve Laggozino works his marionettes. Ed Winter doesn't seem to mind! Ken Kesey and his bus, Further, periodic visitors at the Bagdad, are memorialized. The bearded "regular" shown here, known to many as "the sleepy bookman," was known to doze

through just about anything, even the time the water main broke and flooded the main house during a showing of "The Poseidon Adventure." We'll bet that Jeff the plumber wasn't as casual about it as he seems here!

Lyle Hehn's artwork, emphasizing the Bagdad's musical heritage, rounds out the sizable collaborative mural.

When it first opened, the Bagdad featured a very costly, custom-made Kimball organ to accompany the black-and-white, silent films. For those first years, a local talent named Helen Ernst played that organ. Longtime Portlanders might recognize the sax-toting Vivian McCarty, whose popular Portland all-girl band, the San Su Strutters, highlighted the Bagdad's grand opening festivities in January 1927. Vivian's band remained a staple of the club and music hall scene for years, even doing long engagements in Alaska and Hawaii. Vivian also became a fixture at Southeast Portland's Yukon Tavern, where she continued to perform into her 80s.

Awash with the past, the Back Stage begins anew with space enough for decades more stories and characters. We hope you'll be part of the unfolding story.

