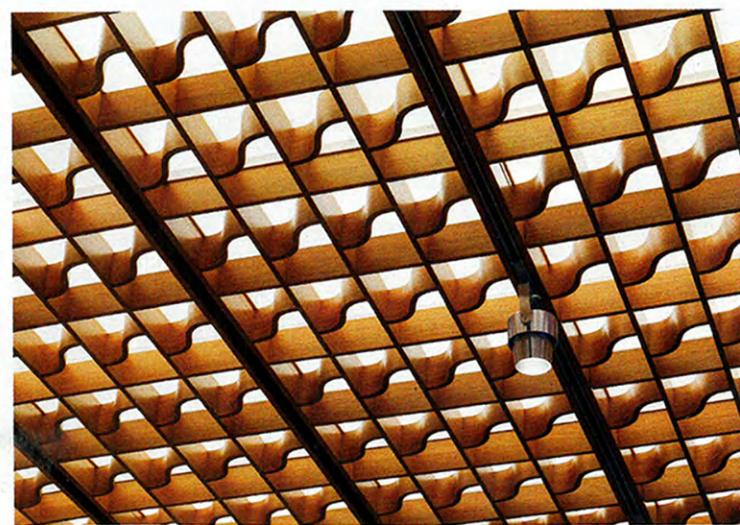


Steinway Hall

Selldorf Architects
Tillotson Design Associates
By Linda C. Lentz

THE RENOWNED piano manufacturer Steinway & Sons recently moved its flagship, Steinway Hall, from the Beaux-Arts New York City landmark it called home for 90 years to a modern Midtown skyscraper. The upshot is a project that will illuminate its brand for 21st-century clientele.

Established in the 1850s, Steinway built a musical legacy in New York with production facilities (now in Queens) and three successive showrooms in Manhattan. Named Steinway Hall, these retail galleries have always offered more than just pianos for sale. The first (circa 1866) housed a 2,000-seat auditorium where the New York Philharmonic played for 25 years. Next, the existing 1925 West 57th Street structure, designed for the company by Warren & Wetmore (RECORD, September 1925, page 201), embraced visitors within its Neoclassical domed reception area, salon-like showrooms/studios, and small concert hall. Like a club-



house, it hosted artists, from Vladimir Horowitz to Billy Joel, who came to concertize, practice, and select pianos for performances around town.

Such a clubby ambience was intimidating to some, says Stephen Milliken, Steinway senior director of global public relations. "It was so segmented, people would walk into the rotunda and didn't explore deeper into the space because

THIRD MOVEMENT An expansive, backlit ceiling, bisected by elegant track lighting, is softened by a custom teak grid modeled on a piano's curve (opposite, top and bottom); a specially commissioned light installation by Spencer Finch hangs above the central stair.

they didn't realize they could." Under the design direction of architect Annabelle Selldorf, the new Steinway Hall is welcoming and contemporary. Yet the architect was careful to integrate established elements of the company's rich craftsmanship and history, such as an end-grain oak floor like that found in both the factory and 1925 interior, used for its ability to withstand weight.

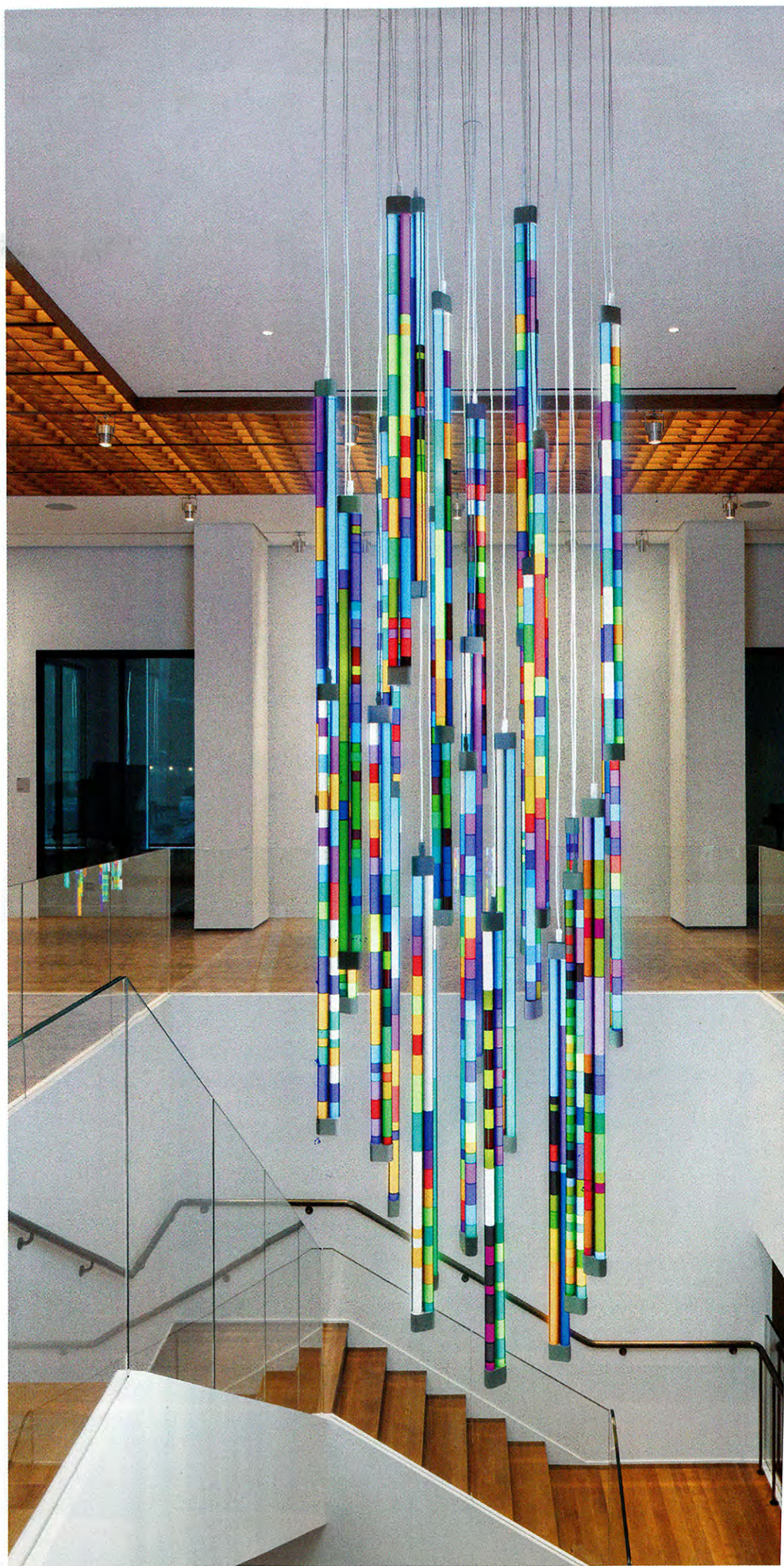
The spacious venue occupies the ground floor and basement of a 19,000-square-foot, single-story extension of an office tower on the Avenue of the Americas. The upper volume, the main selling floor, has 14-foot-high ceilings and ample glazing. It is so clear and informed by daylight, says Selldorf, it feels like a public space.

Wanting to capture this sense of light and openness but also control it, the architect installed white window shades that prevent glare without blocking views. Then she worked with lighting designer Suzan Tillotson to develop an intimate scheme that in addition fulfills Steinway's technical requirements. Together they created a luminous ceiling, backlit with 3,000K LED tapes. Covered by a custom teak grid that echoes the warmth of the wood floor, this acoustically reflective surface washes the room in a diffuse, even light. For sparkle, Tillotson added a flexible track system at regular intervals to highlight the curves and features of the pianos. Mindful of power consumption, maintenance, and cost, she substituted high-quality LED AR111 retrofit lamps for halogen in the track heads.

Amid the subtle luminescence, a vibrant light installation by artist Spencer Finch directs visitors toward a central stair leading to the lower level. Entitled *Newton's Theory of Color and Music (The Goldberg Variations)*, it is based on Bach's famous work and explores the intersection of music, color, and emotion through light.

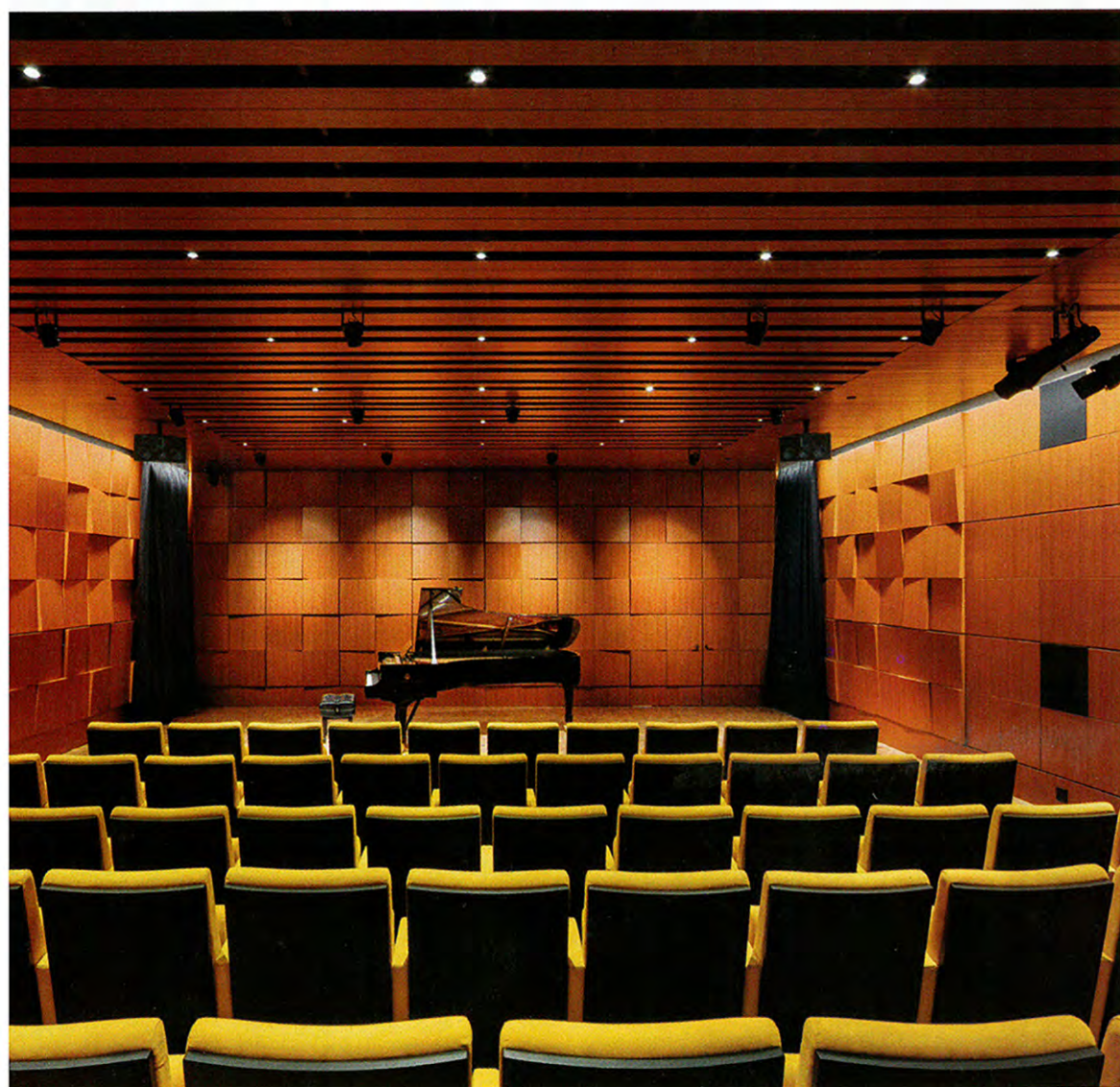
While the showroom continues below, borrowing light that spills down the generous stairwell, the subterranean quarters are largely reserved for a state-of-the-art recording studio and 69-seat recital hall, as well as the surprising new professional haunt for sampling instruments—visible through a glass wall—dubbed the Concert & Artists Selection Room.

"I wanted the atmosphere to change where the concert pianos are," says Selldorf. So she distinguished this special space with a bril-





3HT MOTIFS The Concert & Artists Selection Room (above) has an eye-popping yellow floor and disc-shaped luminaires suspended from an exposed black ceiling. Acoustic requirements determined the specification and placement of the lighting in the teak-lined recital room (below).



liant yellow floor (the color of a concealed faux suede used to articulate the hammers in the piano). To get the height necessary for optimum acoustics, she exposed the ceiling, painting it black to disguise acoustical materials and mechanicals, and distributed a dramatic array of custom lighting “discs” across its expanse. Inspired by fixtures in Marcel Breuer’s Whitney and Richard Rogers’s Madrid-Barajas and London Heathrow airports, Selldorf teamed with Tillotson to craft this metal luminaire comprising LED tape circling the perimeter with a stretch PVC diffuser.

Acoustics were a driving factor throughout the project, but nowhere more than in the teak-lined recital hall. Because it will be used for critical listening and recording, the Tillotson team located LED drivers outside the room to minimize background noise and positioned fixtures to prevent potential vibrations. As an extra precaution, the lighting designers and Arup acoustician Nathan Blum paired various LED retrofits and fixtures to determine compatibility prior to specification. The resulting scheme uses a mix of halogen and LED lamping and is integrated into the audio/video controls to facilitate management of individual zones, or composed lighting scenes.

Like a jewel box, the rejuvenated Steinway Hall glows from within its prominent new location, displaying its finely tuned merchandise to passersby and reverberating with a musical heritage that spans more than a century. Says Milliken, “We can’t abandon that.” ■

credits

ARCHITECT: Selldorf Architects – Annabelle Selldorf, principal; Julie Hausch-Fen; partner in charge; Myriel Mechling, project manager

LIGHTING DESIGN: Tillotson Design Associates – Suzan Tillotson, principal

ENGINEERS: Severud (structural); AltieriSeborWieber (m/e/p)

CONSULTANTS: Spencer Finch (light installation); Arup (acoustics)

CLIENT: Steinway & Sons

SIZE: 19,000 square feet

COST: withheld

COMPLETION DATE: April 2016

SOURCES

FLOORS: Kaswell (end-grain oak); Fusion Floors (seamless yellow)

LIGHTING: Litelab (track); Sora (LED replacement lamps); Newmat (custom discs); ETC (spotlights); B-K Lighting (pendants); Electrix (cove); Prescolite, USAI (downlights)