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Essence Music Festival: The VIP Area

Aug 24, 2010 11:44 AM, By Stefan Beese

Awell received revision to the [stage layout for the Essence Awards](#) was acting on the request to open up an extended VIP area (executed by Ken Battles of Revitalizations, LLC) stage right. My design aimed to include and enlarge the area located behind the stage structure, opening up to allow VIP viewers access to step outside the usual backstage perimeter and have a perfect side view of the live performance.

This additional footprint is to be thought of as being an extension of the stage itself, not a platform separate from what is going on behind this canopy stage. In executing this, a fluid fabric extension was created where the volume becomes part of the canopy over that VIP area. This created a large opening and dropped down to wrap around the railing of the new extended area, permitting one to actually walk out from what was previously an enclosed space and view the performance from this deck. This was very helpful in incorporating the performance into this space and providing one shared experience.



[View renderings of the Essence Music Festival here.](#)

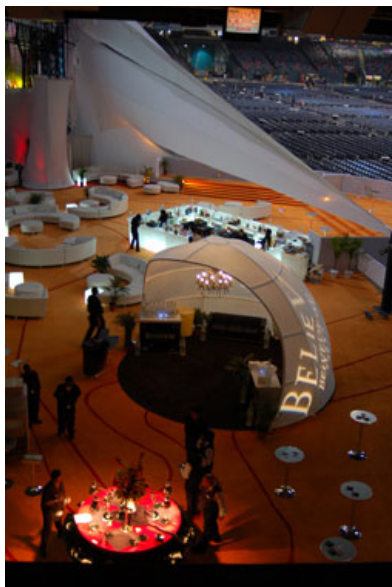
The difficulty in executing such an elaborate design endeavor is achieving full collaboration with all parties involved; this cannot work in the classical scenario that splits each entity into their individual scope of work. Here, vendors work in a vacuum and become territorial about tasks, causing a project like this to fail. This came to a head a few times, where the design team was forced to remove certain elements that could not be realized once on site, due to the aforementioned complications. Thankfully, the majority found a way to steer in a cooperative direction and work together. It is refreshing to work with entities that are open minded and communicative, people who share the same energy and efforts to fuse the classical live event components into one cohesive product.

This 2010 design was a complicated in both development and implementation. The most important goal was designing something more sculptural that avoided any wall/curtain covering the production and backstage areas. This was to make the design readable as a shelter and surface that communicates to the audience through the performer. So far the "prototype" worked well, and everything has been well received; the next step consists of improving upon what was learned during this satisfying and ever-evolving process.

Stefan Beese is a native German production designer and architect who moved to Los Angeles in 1999 where he founded Beesign. He studied at the University of Applied Science, Kiel, and at the University of Design and Media in Hanover, Germany. He is the co-founder of RE:BE Design, a joint entertainment design company with Stephen Rehage. He resides in New Orleans, LA.

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The Essence Music Festival is a three-day concert and cultural seminar series produced by Rehage Entertainment, Inc, and held in the Louisiana Superdome and Ernest N. Morial Convention Center. It is the largest African-American music and empowerment event in the country; and the 2010 Festival featured