

# A GLEAM in Our Eye

The Pantages Is Glowing,  
Thanks to a \$10-Million Restoration—  
and 'The Lion King'

Photographs by Jennifer Cheung and Steven Nilsson

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THE SHINE SEEMED LONG GONE FROM HOLLYWOOD'S Pantages Theatre when the Walt Disney Co. dubbed the site its L.A. home for "The Lion King," the musical adaptation of the animated film that opens Oct. 19. Seventy years of grime, multiple layers of misguided improvements and the general deterioration of the neighborhood had worn down the Art Moderne structure, which opened as a movie house on June 4, 1930.

But Disney needed a large theater in Los Angeles where the spectacle, directed by Julie Taymor, could stay indefinitely. Disney ruled out the Ahmanson Theatre because of its subscription series, and the Shubert Theatre in Century City, in part because of its location. The decision, officials say, came down to the configuration of the Pantages itself, the freeway accessibility and the already promising revitalization of Hollywood.

Plus theater impresario and owner James M. Nederlander promised to fix it up. Big time.

Ten million dollars later—which Nederlander says is twice what he expected to spend—every surface of the Pantages has been painted, cleaned, rebuilt or restored under the guidance of interior designer Roger Morgan of Sachs Morgan Studio in New York. The evidence is in the details. More than 84,000 square feet of metal leafing—brass, aluminum and copper—has been applied to the Art Deco surfaces, from the theater's highly detailed ceiling to the innumerable wall decorations to the ornately reconstructed entrance lobby.

Built for the then-extravagant sum of \$1½ million, today's Pantages has not lost its signature glamour; it will remain comfortably familiar to regular patrons, but every inch now sparkles in the glow from the landmark Art Deco chandelier that hangs above the audience, as well as a series of newly re-created fixtures throughout the lobby. New seating, a fully carpeted auditorium and additional ladies' rooms, all the work of the L.A.-based firm SPF:architects, will make the theater more enjoyable.

Nederlander credits Disney with spurring the 10-month renovation, and he says he's proud to have gone all out on the project. "If you're going to do it, you might as well do it right," he says. "Los Angeles deserves it."

—Susan Freudenheim



Ornate details, complete with metal leafing, fill the theater from the lobby, top, to the stairway leading to the balcony. An Art Deco chandelier is the centerpiece of the auditorium, right and opposite.