

BAGDAD

Theater & Pub



Welcome to the open house at McMenamins Historic Bagdad Theater and Pub. We are pleased that you dropped by to help us celebrate this wonderful neighborhood landmark. Grab a pint, stroll around and experience the mix of character, history and modern offerings that makes this a revered community treasure. What follows is a brief history of the movie palace and its reincarnation as a pioneering theater pub and gathering place.

History



An extravaganza of light, music and dancing marked the Bagdad Theater's 1927 grand opening. Outside the new "Oasis for Entertainment," hundreds of celebrants crowded onto Hawthorne Boulevard, which was roped off for the occasion. A street dance jumped to a live band as search lights sliced through the night sky. The din quieted for a rousing speech heralding the building's importance to the community, presented by Portland Mayor, George Baker--

who earlier had opened the Baker Theater in the city. Other "dignitaries" on hand for the opening included Marilyn Mills and her horse, Beverly-- both direct from the Hollywood studios.

Few expenses were spared to create the eastside movie palace. Capitalized in part by the deep pockets of its parent company, Universal Pictures, the Bagdad was called "a triumph of artistry and craftsmanship." In 1927, it stood as the city's largest theater outside the downtown area. Beyond its size, patrons marveled at the theater's gurgling fountain and grand colonnade in its foyer, along with the Bagdad's Middle-Eastern decor, right down to the Arabian-styled uniforms worn by the usherettes. Even the conductor selected to lead the Bagdad's orchestra was a musician of great prominence, having studied under Tchaikovsky.

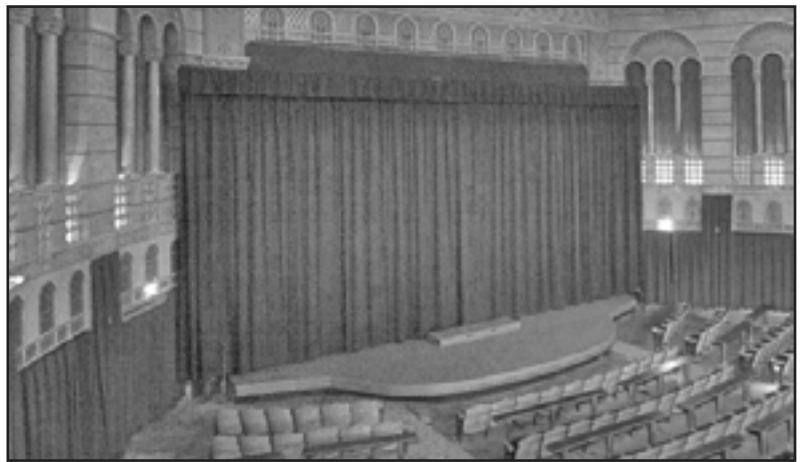
At the time of the Bagdad's opening, Americans' fixation with movies and the Hollywood allure was already well established. Demonstrating the

local craving for celluloid heroes, a cider mill and church were sacrificed in order for the ornate Bagdad to be built on the southeast Portland site. A surge of excitement was generated worldwide in the months following the Bagdad's opening by the premiere of the first "talkies." Prior to 1927, theatergoers had enjoyed only silent films, accompanied by an organist or in the more posh movie palaces, live orchestras. And, of course, vaudeville acts were very popular.





Then: Called “a triumph of artistry and craftsmanship,” the expansive stage, grande-colonnade and Middle-Eastern styling marveled newcomers in 1927.



Now: The orchestra is gone, but not much else has changed at the modern-day Bagdad: its elegance and scale still awes.

During the Bagdad’s first years, silent movies and vaudeville reigned supreme at the eastside palace. In fact, vaudeville remained a key part of the Bagdad’s programs through the 1940s. Sammy Davis, Jr., performing with the Will Mastin Trio, was one of the many acts to grace its expansive stage. The Bagdad has also been the scene of some notable movie premiere galas. In 1975, actors Jack Nicholson and Louise Fletcher along with producer Michael Douglas appeared at the Bagdad for the Oregon premiere of “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.” About fifteen years later, the premiere of “My Own Private Idaho” was screened soon after McMenamins reopened the movie palace in 1991.

A New Life

When McMenamins took stewardship of the property, the Bagdad had been a SE Portland landmark anchoring the Hawthorne district on this visible corner for nearly 65 years. For several generations, “Meet me at the Bagdad!” was the slogan for area residents looking for a convenient escape or to catch a glimpse of stardom. Now, some two decades after taking the reins, our aim is still to continue that long tradition of a community gathering spot.

Today, the grand and time-honored theater offers much more than just the latest Hollywood releases.



The Bagdad has hosted many of the Powell’s Books Author Series, welcoming a parade of prominent writers and poets in the main auditorium. Music, too, has become a popular addition as the occasional performance graces the main stage. Local and independent film screenings have further added to the mix. An early twist we made was the Greater Trumps pub, a cozy spot within the vast property. Recent renovation of the Back Stage Bar created a whole other atmosphere: art, vertical space and pool tables.

Increasingly, private events have taken advantage of all of the Bagdad’s memorable spaces. The main hall is of course an ideal environment for late-night events and parties,



featuring private screenings of movies. Also, renovations of the upper event rooms of the Back Stage Bar has given the theater still more great spaces to host moderately sized private parties and catered events.

The Bagdad’s celebrated 1927 opening changed the neighborhood and brought the allure of Hollywood and the Middle East to SE Portland. Today McMenamins’ Bagdad Theater and Pub(s) perpetuates the landmark’s role as a hub and favorite destination for folks all over the region.