

# Now Playing on the Big Screen

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**To restore a ceiling when the original process is a lost art, a screen printer was called.**



*When the new owner removed a false ceiling, the decorative 1895 original surface was revealed. Since such painting is today a lost art, the owner turned to screen printing as an alternative method of restoration.*

## **19TH CENTURY DESIGN SAVED**

**A** 1895 MISSOURI BUILDING IS starting a new life, thanks in part, to a leading screen printing company in Kansas City, Missouri.

Originally built to house the Kansas City Library, the venerable building underwent several remodelings before being purchased by Ozark National Life Insurance Company about five years ago. The new owner decided to restore the building and lease office suites

customized for the occupant's needs. Restoration was overseen by the Kansas City Historical Society.

Early in the restoration, the removal of a false ceiling—in what had originally been the library's reading room—revealed an intricately handpainted ceiling comprising three different kinds of panels: large ceiling squares, divider strips, and barrel coves on the sides.

The building owner agreed to try to restore the ceiling to its original splendor. Since painting ceilings in such a manner is pretty much a lost art, the owner sought an alternative method to restoration—and that's when Kansas City Poster Display Company agreed to help.

The company—which screen prints wall murals, among other items—got involved in the restoration in November 1988. Time and effort spent planning was nearly as involved as the actual production process.

Kansas City Poster's Jim Ballinger had the job of estimating production time and material needs and costs, as well as planning the sheet and color rotation for maximum printing efficiency. Once that was completed, Sandy Fuhrmann of the company's art department used photos, videotapes and tracings of the original ceiling panels to recreate the artwork and handcut the stencils to the customer's specifications.

## **Since such painting is a lost art, the owner sought an alternative**

"We used nine different colors and 54 printing plates, and printed the designs on 5'x13' sections of vinyl material, like wallpaper," says Larry Kleiboeker, vice president and general

manager of Kansas City Poster Display Company. "The project took two and a half months to complete, with artwork, film, and printed colors approved at each step of the process.

"As each sheet—or section—was completed, we would hang it for the customers' approval before proceeding with production. This was particularly difficult because we had to satisfy four people: the lessee, the architect, the owner and, especially, the historical society, which needed to ensure the overall integrity of the restoration."

The large ceiling panels were screen printed in five sections; the barrel coves, in three.

"Registration was critical," Kleiboeker says, "because of the design, and the way it flowed from sheet to sheet. We didn't want noticeable seam lines and, of course, the colors had to match perfectly. Considering the cost-and availability-of the material we were using and the necessity of printing from a single dye lot, we had a very small margin of error."

The new suite opened this past March, with special lighting installed to highlight the ceiling panels.

"Everyone who had a part in the job took pride and interest in the project," reports Kleiboeker. "Everyone—the owner, the lessee, the architect, the historical society, and the people here at KC. Poster—worked together and the result was outstanding."

Could this ceiling have been restored as economically without screen printing? According to Kleiboeker, other

methods of restoration were considered—and eliminated—by the principals before Kansas City Poster Display Company was approached about screen printing the panels:

## **Screen printing has always been best for 'difficult' substrates.**

Completely hand painting the ceiling as it had been before would have necessitated hiring an artist, a measure too expensive to consider seriously, even if an artist willing to undertake the project could have been found. Likewise, using stencils to recreate the artwork was cost prohibitive. Other printing methods were eliminated because the run was too short to make them economically feasible.

"Screen printing was really the only appropriate method for reproducing the artistry of the ceiling," Kleiboeker says.

Screen printing is a leading production medium for textile graphics, decal manufacturing, container decorating, circuitry printing, industry and close tolerance work, fleet markings, specialty advertising, and many objects that can't be fed through other printing presses.

When should screen printing be chosen in preference to other production methods? Screen printing has always been a good choice for printing on "difficult" substrates. The process prints on virtually any surface, including wood, metal, glass, fabric, plastic and vinyl. It is also less complex than offset lithography, so samples, one-of-a-kind, and prototype quantities—such as the ceiling panels—can be produced more economically.

The process' unique advantages include depth of color achieved through thicker ink deposits—a capability offering strong, punchy colors for many design needs. Screen-printed products are also less prone to fading when exposed to sunlight.

Screen printing is a traditional craft which goes back a long way. In the past ten years, however, it has found many new commercial uses. 