

brought to you by

SPOTLIGHT
CINEMA NETWORKS



The concessions stand has a black veneer with metallic speckles. The accent panels are a mustard color with many abstract color accents. It boasts a beautiful tomato-red espresso machine. The theater offers a few unusual items, not the least of which are Italian coffees and beverages that are imported from Italy, and each espresso, cappuccino, macchiato is ground, packed, and brewed to order.

**MADISON
ART CINEMAS**
MADISON, CONN.

by Arnold Gorlick, Owner

SCREENS
2

OCCUPANCY:
Screen 1: 221
Screen 2: 202

TOP-PERFORMING TITLES
2016

Lion, Manchester by the Sea, La La Land, A Man Called Ove, Moonlight, Florence Foster Jenkins, Lady in the Van

TOP PERFORMING TITLES
ALL TIME

Silver Linings Playbook, Slumdog Millionaire, The King's Speech, Midnight in Paris, Fahrenheit 9/11, The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, Juno, Brokeback Mountain, The Descendants, The Imitation Game

HISTORY

>> The Bonoff Theatre opened in 1912, originally as a single-screen theater, with a seating capacity given as 597 in 1941. In 1948 it

was remodeled to the plans of architectural firm William Riseman Associates and was renamed Madison Theater.

Hoyts Theatres (the Australian chain) purchased the theater from its local owner-operator. They twinned the theater in 1977. At some point in the building's history, it served as a meeting hall and gymnasium as well. Beneath the sloped wooden floor (painted in Brazilian green) is a basketball court. Hoyts closed the theater as a mainstream Hollywood theater on April 30, 1998. Arnold Gorlick signed the lease in January 1999. The theater reopened as the Madison Art Cinemas on May 21, 1999.

I do not believe in the idea of the self-made man or woman. As with all other enterprises, one must collaborate with others who share your vision. So while I am the most visible face of the Madison Art Cinemas, there are others who helped make the Madison Art Cinemas a reality: The devoted work of Largo Construction Co. of

greater Philadelphia (owned and operated by Tony Cimino) got us to the finish line ahead of schedule and affordably. Vladimir Shpitalnik (Yale Drama School set, stage, and costume designer) gave the theater its unique design and color palette; the late Ben Mordecai (former Yale University dean of theater marketing and Broadway producer) worked with me to develop a marketing strategy to launch the theater; attorney Michael Forte, who negotiated the lease without knowing how he might be paid should the deal crater; my film buyer, Rob Lawinski of Brielle Cinemas, whose tireless passion and devotion has helped make the Madison Art Cinemas among the consistently top-grossing art cinemas in the State of Connecticut.

AUDIENCE

Our audience tends to be well-read, well-educated, with a strong interest in the arts. While mainstream theaters tend to play to a demographic between 17 to 21 years old weighted toward males, our audience tends to have a preponderance of senior citizens weighted toward females. Our primary demographic is over 40 years old.

Since our early days, we have availed the theater for fund-raising events for charities and social-ac-

tion groups. Church and religious organizations, Habitat for Humanity, and Madison Lions Club among many others turn to us for special movie events to raise money and awareness of their organizations' missions. The Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven includes the Madison Art Cinemas as one of their sites for their ongoing seasonal Jewish Film Festivals.

CONCESSIONS

While we do provide the usual popcorn and fountain soda, we take great pride in our espresso bar, whose focal point is our Faema espresso machine. We provide a variety of Italian coffee beverages as well as freshly brewed airpot coffee. We grind, pack, and brew all of our coffees to order. During the summer months we brew our iced tea from loose tea leaves only (Harney & Sons fine teas). We cannot overstate the role that our coffee vendor, Omnipak Imports, has played in bringing us to the pinnacle of excellence in our coffee offerings. They provide us with the finest Esse espresso beans (imported from Italy) and their own roast of Colombian Supremo coffee beans for our airpots. Although we are surrounded by coffee shops, cafés, Starbucks, and a local coffee roaster, we pride ourselves on serving the finest coffee anywhere. Our audience has come to appreciate our coffees and the locally baked biscotti, and we serve our Italian coffees in ceramic, not paper. Since we serve an older clientele, we have no candies that appeal exclusively to children. We vend high-quality chocolates (mostly dark), which include Endangered Species Chocolates, Toblerone and a couple of sugar-free items. And for the discerning and nostalgic palate we do offer one of the greatest confections ever, Goldenberg Peanut Chews, a rarity.

PROGRAMMING

As an art house I like to think that rather than program titles, we curate. This is particularly important with a two-screen theater (how we dream of four screens) where mistakes are costly. That said, we see ourselves as providing a consistent and reliable standard of excellence in everything we do, particularly our selections of movies. Often one attends screenings of certain movies of exquisite artistic merit that might not have the box office potential that other fine titles might have that tend toward the mainstream. At times we resist the temptation to go for the more mainstream movies that might guarantee a certain box office return. This means taking some short-term losses to provide consistent quality that our patrons can depend on almost blindly. We aim in every way to distinguish ourselves not only from every multiplex in our area, but from all theaters on the southeastern shoreline of Connecticut with our uncom-



**ARNOLD
GORLICK**



CARE FOR A BISCOFFO?

The brick wall starts a gallery that extends around the corners into the corridors on the opposite and both sides of the concessions stand. Turning right brings one to a small five-bistro-table café that seats 15. The café walls are decorated with copies of true antique posters that have been torn and placed randomly to give the impression that there were years of pasting, removing and mounting new posters. The posters were then covered with a very transparent orange wash continuing the color scheme while permitting one to view the mementos clearly.

promising adherence to excellence and art. This does not mean that we are beneath playing day and date with the multiplexes with movies like *Florence Foster Jenkins*, *The Help*, or *Hope Springs*, all of which had wide releases. But what these titles have in common is that they appeal directly to our primary demographic of women over 40. Our grosses compare favorably with all theaters in the state with such content—regrettably, we did not get the opportunity to test this idea further this year with *Hidden Figures*; we just had no room.

Beyond this, we have a remarkable Sunday program called The Cinema Club that distinguishes us from all theaters in the state. Our Greater New Haven Cinema Club is a collaboration with Andrew Mencher, who brilliantly oversees eight chapters of The Cinema Club throughout the country. There are two seasonal subscription series of seven screenings each. Our Cinema Club members get to attend these sneak previews of the best new American independent and foreign films of the season on select Sunday mornings—before their local release—followed by engaging discussions with fellow film enthusiasts and led by two Yale University film professors who alternate screenings. Additionally, we frequently host scholars who might be experts on the topic of that day's movie, renowned film critics, and occasionally a principal of the film. Our collaboration with Andy Mencher confers importance on

our theater and gives valuable feedback not only to ourselves, but to the distributors who participate in the program. Andy is one of our most cherished and meaningful ties—more evidence that we can't do this alone.

SHOWMANSHIP

Showmanship and marketing are vanishing arts whose remnants can be found uniquely in the art house community. As the collaboration in advertising and marketing becomes increasingly depersonalized and

passive, no longer does it tend to involve the exhibitor who is best situated to understand and reach one's local market. So those of us who still actively promote our titles must continually create opportunities to market. While there are fewer of them left, I sustain ties with my area features and arts editors, weekend and entertainment guide editors. They are important go-to sources for feature stories on upcoming openings and events. I regularly try to match a charitable group with a local premiere opening of an important title that might complement their group's mission. Or, I am constantly doing tie-ins with our local esteemed bookstore, RJ Julia Booksellers, which is right across the street from MAC. When *Hope Springs* opened in August of 2012, we partnered with the local food market, where one of the scenes was shot with Meryl Streep. We had a big celebration at the market with refreshments and hors d'oeuvres. There was press and TV coverage before and after the event. Then everyone drove over to the theater for the first 7 p.m. show. With that promotion we delivered the fourth-highest opening-day gross for *Hope Springs* in the nation. But the most recent and meaningful promotion began right after I saw *Moonlight* at the Toronto International Film Festival. First, I wondered whether our 99 percent wealthy-white clientele would support it. Then I reminded myself that this is what we do. We play the best there is,



ON THE INSIDE

Each auditorium has a large screen with 12 channels of Dolby Digital sound powered by QSC amplifiers through the best quality JBL speakers. The auditoria have columns which rise from the outside walls and form supports at intervals which span the entire width of the theater building. The ceiling and supports are covered with bead board. Each pilaster (column) and cross support is painted in aquamarine. The rest of the ceiling which is recessed above the supports is painted in flat black. The common wall between each theater has faux columns which parallel the pilasters and continue the sight line to obtain psychological symmetry. Each column has an antique looking boxed scone with a patina. The drapery is tightly pleated and is antique gold. The wooden border that divides drapery from the lower painted red wall is aquamarine. The high seat backs are red vinyl with red and gold satiny upholstery. The seat pans are black and the side panels that are visible are aquamarine. Each theater has one aisle approximately centered with the seating rows divided into two sections of 6 and 8 seats across. There are amber Tivoli lights in the aisles.

and to overcome challenges at the box office we devise powerful and unique marketing strategies. In this case our promotion of *Moonlight* itself gained national and statewide attention with stories in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Hartford Courant*, *New Haven Register*, *Shoreline Times*, Shore Publishing and the *New London Day*; all beyond the press that I mediated for the movie. I greeted well-attended movie audiences with curtain appearances. Night after night, I spoke passionately about why they must see *Moonlight* as a moral imperative and how they would identify with the most unlikely characters and that they would also experience a movie of rare poetic artistry. I pleaded with the editors and journalists to not only run prominent reviews of *Moonlight*, but to do feature stories as well. I'd like to extend a word of thanks to A24 Films, who gave me whatever I needed, including time, to help me promote *Moonlight*. They are a singular example of what collaboration between exhibitors and distributors used to be at its best. The folks at A24 are paragons of intelligent marketing and recognize and reward it in others.

CINEMA ADVERTISING

About 12 years ago I came to appreciate on-screen advertising as an important source of revenue. I watched the quality of our pre-show advertising decline and become generic with little relevance to our

specialized and most devoted audience. That led us to create our own local ads and to provide our own trivia. We were successful, but it was hard, time-consuming work that took time and energy away from the day-to-day tasks of running the theater itself. Then came Spotlight Cinema Networks. Our first contact was with Ronnie Ycong, SVP, Exhibitor Relations & Operations, whose honesty, patience, and clear and simple communication as to what on-screen advertising could be won us over to give it a try.

Spotlight complements our aforementioned pursuit of excellence with their high-quality and personalized graphics. The ads they provide are particularly relevant to our thoughtful clientele. We appreciate how all ads are presented to us for "creative review." They give us, the exhibitor, final say as to what ad content will go on the screen. Last, the pre-show trivia, the amusing and informative short subjects, and the tastefulness of the "rolling stock" ads have our audience engaged and enthralled. We no longer hear, "Why are there so many ads?" Beyond our aforementioned pursuit of excellence is the understanding that people lament the depersonalization of their daily lives. We at the Madison Art Cinemas seek to provide a personalized, engaged, humanized experience and dialogue with our patrons; an approach we like to think distinguishes us from the pack. Spotlight Cinema Networks aids us in that pursuit and is one of the important supports in achieving our mission. Their product is tasteful. They, themselves, are communicative, creative, fully engaged, and unswerving in the quality of their product and ties that they maintain with their clients. Choosing Spotlight Cinema Networks for our on-screen advertising is one of the best decisions we have made. ■

Indie Focus is a monthly feature showcasing successful independent theaters, brought to you by Spotlight Cinema Networks.