

# DESIGN SOLUTIONS

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# THE SKY'S THE LIMIT AT Florida Planetarium.

**H**oused in the South Florida Museum, Bradenton, the largest natural and cultural history museum on Florida's Gulf Coast, the Bishop Planetarium reopened in 2005 after being destroyed by a disastrous electrical fire in 2001. The all digital, full dome planetarium/theater features astronomy presentations, light shows and wide-screen large format programming.



Creative Arts Unlimited, an AWI member firm located in Pinellas Park, Florida, completed the design, architectural woodwork fabrication and installation for the project. A design/build firm, Creative Arts specializes in creating turnkey interior environments for museums, libraries and healthcare facilities.

South Florida Museum, which focuses on Florida's peoples and history, is undergoing a \$5 million renovation. For the planetarium, "we wanted a rich, unique, dramatic appearance, reminiscent of the opulent theaters of the 1930s and 1940s," says Museum Director Alan Haines. "We wanted something non-traditional and were happy to approve the Creative Arts Unlimited proposal for this treatment."

**GRAND LOBBY**

The 25,000 square foot lobby of the Bishop Planetarium took six weeks for design and approximately three months for production of the \$320,000 project. As the planetarium is a well-known destination, the interior needed to feel very permanent and luxurious.

The style of the lobby is contemporary with traditional influences. Traditional materials like Mahogany and Anigre were used to create a two-tone effect. The inlaid brushed steel orbit patterns tie it all in to the planetarium.

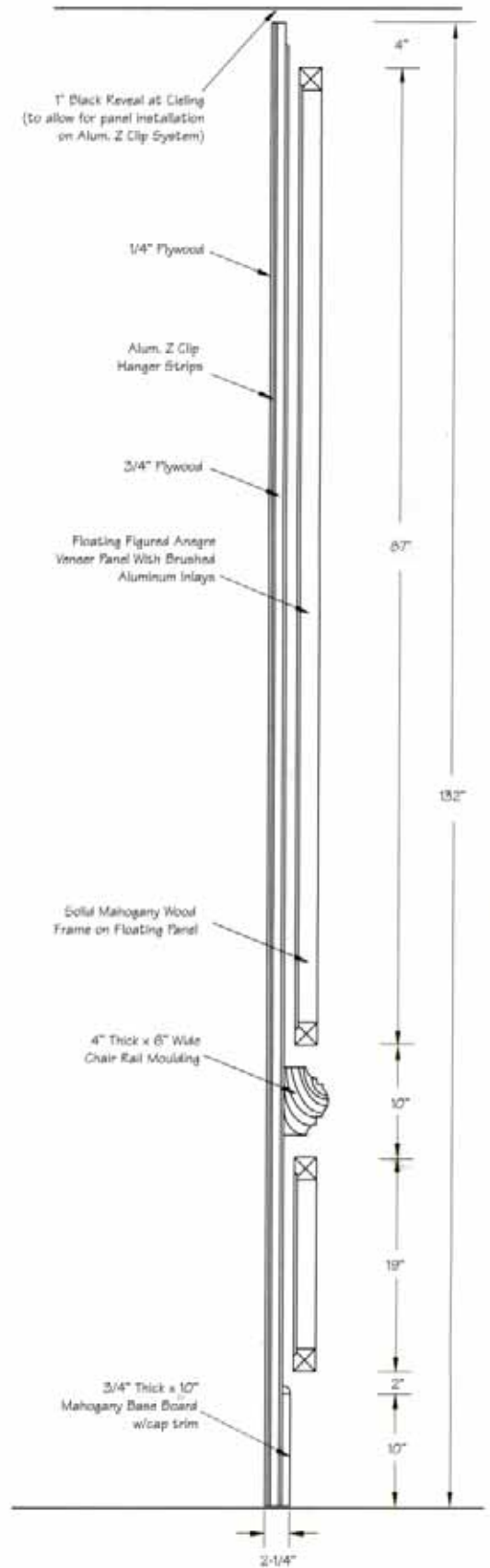
"The design spark started with the columns," explains Bruce Merenda, Creative Arts' design director. "By wrapping banquettes around the base of the columns and adding flared illuminated caps, we created seating for guests and a strong architectural statement. The scale of the columns makes the space look and feel grand."

All of the walls are paneled with matched Anigre panels, trimmed with Mahogany base, crown and chair rail. Curved Anigre panels, inlaid with brushed steel orbital patterns and framed in Mahogany, are mounted one inch off the wall panels. Columns were fabricated using the same technique. Banquette seating, panel edging and baseboards are Mahogany.

**DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS**

One of the outstanding characteristics of this project is the brushed stainless steel accents, points out Production Manager Tim Grolley. "Our biggest challenge concerned cutting the metal to a tight tolerance in order to inlay it into the curved wood panels. Initially, the metal would expand and destroy the Anigre. To solve this unusual problem, we placed the wood and metal on a stable phenolic substrate, which allowed the materials to expand and contract at the same rate."

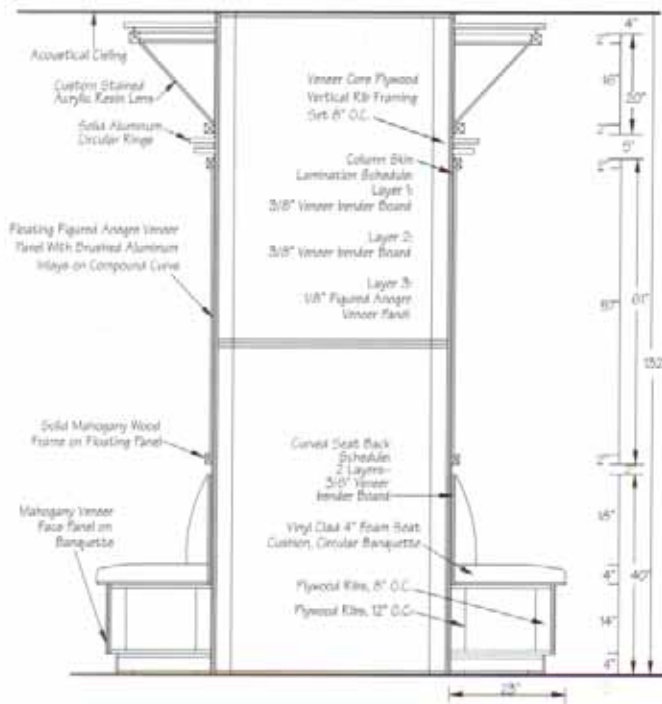
Artists from Creative Arts Unlimited created the domed ceiling mural, basing it on a Hubbell telescope photograph. They also created the lacquered acrylic panels in the column



LOBBY WALL PANEL SYSTEM  
Vertical Section

MUSEUM STORE

Bishop Planetarium Lobby



VERTICAL SECTION  
Seating Banquettes at Columns

capitals, which are made from formed acrylic, resin stains and fabric. Additionally, the AWI member firm produced interior elements of the planetarium, such as the projection booth and wall panels with orbital patterns, and installed the specialty lighting.

Grolley reports that using a center-balanced technique, all the book-matched Anigre panels were cut from a single tree found in Africa. Because of this, says Haines, "blending throughout the space, whether on angles or curved surfaces, is flawless."

"The curves were challenging," says Merenda. "It was difficult to inlay the brushed steel on a curve, maintaining perfect seams. But we wanted to add the steel accent to make it fresh and exciting for young guests. Also, the thick Mahogany panels needed to be affixed to a curved frame to follow the walls."

### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Since the designers and woodworkers are all in one building, they work very closely as a team to ensure that the design intent is correct.

"The designer and I work closely together," adds Grolley. "I relay the way items need to be fabricated and we try to value engineer everything in order to make it cost effective and to make a product that will stand the test of time."

To keep on track with the schedule, he continues, meant the fabricating team had to pre-glue the substrate and at the same time create the finished product on top of the veneer with contact to relay to the laminating department. The object was to get the curves done to stay ahead of the finishers so that dry times would equal the finish schedule time.

Museum staff worked closely with Creative Arts as well. "We have come to rely on them as completely dependable, altogether professional and extraordinarily creative," says Haines.

Rebuilding Bishop Planetarium, a very popular educational resource for the region, was a long and difficult undertaking. However, "the end result exceeded our most ambitious expectations," summarizes Haines. "The Anigre panels are an attraction in themselves. The masterful design and fabrication contributions by Creative Arts are truly spectacular and a 'must-see' for visitors to this area." 🏆

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Project:	<b>Bishop Planetarium Lobby</b>	Bradenton, FL
Project Owner:	<b>South Florida Museum</b>	Bradenton, FL
Woodworker:	<b>Creative Arts Unlimited</b>	Pinellas Park, FL
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