

Baby, don't you want to go?

# Sweet home Cleveland

The House of Blues is just the newest entertainment venue to draw people back to the city

BY CINDY GRAHL | EDITOR

Little did Jake and Elwood Blues, aka John Belushi and Dan Ackroyd, know what they were doing when the two comedians stumbled onto the Saturday Night Live stage to perform a fun little music number. It took off like gangbusters, of course, leading to one hit movie and then another, and finally, a chain of blues bars.

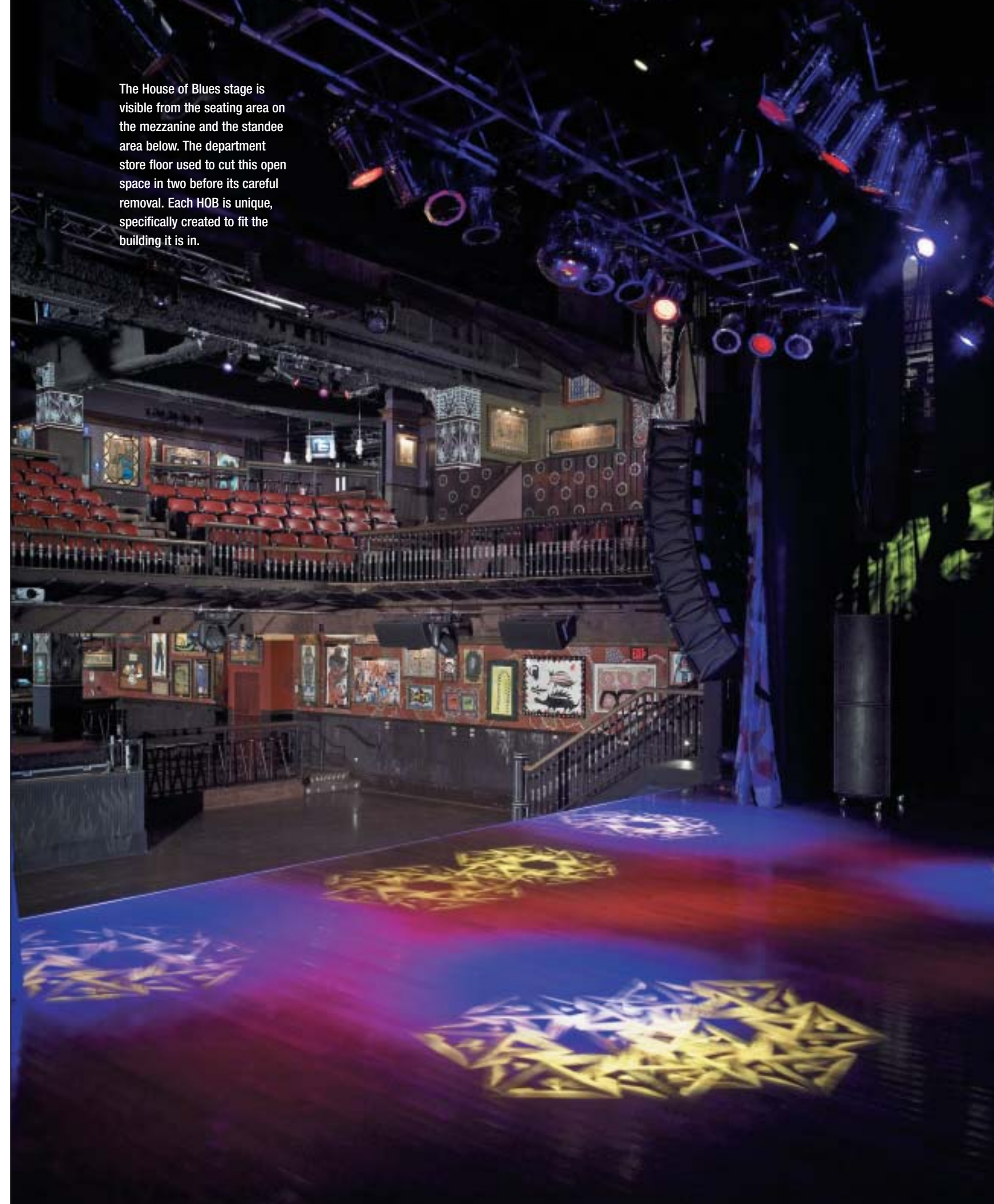
"We were looking at a number of cities to bring the House of Blues to," says Aidan Scully, senior director of development for House of Blues Entertainment. But it was developer Rick Maron of MRN Ltd. who approached HOB about coming to Cleveland. "We had a few locations under consideration, but Rick's was a prime opportunity. It was like our New Orleans location, in a section of town that should be brought back, and we saw the same type of opportunity in Cleveland." HOB already had ties here at Blossom and the Scene stage at Nautica.

MRN chose D-A-S Construction to create the HOB, based on previous experience with the contractor. Developer, tenant, architect and contractor formed a close-knit team. "With a job like this, no one is successful unless we are all successful," says Mike Lowry, AIA, project manager for architectural firm Cooper Carry



The House of Blues grand opening featured the Blues Brothers' Dan Ackroyd on stage.

The House of Blues stage is visible from the seating area on the mezzanine and the standee area below. The department store floor used to cut this open space in two before its careful removal. Each HOB is unique, specifically created to fit the building it is in.



**Facing (above left):** The House of Blues restaurant has an entrance off of E. 4th St. this room was originally part of the Rainbow Building, which had to be totally rebuilt inside.

**Facing (above right):** The entrance to the music hall, off Euclid. Right next door, another old dime store becomes apartments.

**Facing (below):** The cozy Cambridge Room. The new Foundation Room will be even higher end.

**Built for comfort**

Each House of Blues is different, says Scully, designed to fit an existing building. This is where the HOB's expertise comes in—it understands the needs of its patrons and how they want to experience the music, food and ambiance HOB offers. Cleveland's 50,000-sf facility was no exception. "We start with an attitude," says Scully. "Our customers are guests in our home, so

**Further on up the road**

The architectural firm that designed HOB, Cooper Carry, also designed the city's refurbished E. 4th St. and worked on the Euclid Corridor Transportation Project. Its unique credentials help it understand how the HOB fits into our urban landscape.

The enhancement of E. 4th St. as a one-way street narrows the roadway as it widens sidewalks for outdoor strolling and dining. The new streetscape includes unique pavers, an underground snowmelt system and exciting new lighting strung overhead, as well as a lighted phoenix sculpture designating the street's entrance and symbolizing its rebirth. Serving to connect Public Square and the Old Arcade with the Gateway District, the 400,000-sf of streetscape now houses two outstanding entertainment and dining venues, as well as five residential projects with 200 units, in addition to 3,400 parking spaces nearby. The area is being developed by MRN Ltd, owner of many residential buildings along the streetside. **BXM**

we configure our venues specifically to create a good interface between audience and performers."

According to Lowry, the varying architecture of each HOB site creates differing personalities for each venue. "There is no overall HOB plan," he says. "We know we will have a concert hall, but then we begin to plan from the point of view of what the customer needs, looking at sight lines, flow of traffic, user friendliness and guest comfort. And we

design for the performers, too, starting at the back door. If performers are happy, that energy goes from the stage to the guests."

Lowry notes that HOB goes into old structures with character and introduces new uses and high tech. The space is carefully planned—so much is going on in it: the 300-seat restaurant, kitchens, three stages, party rooms, and green rooms for performers, who are accommodated in every way.

**I'm tore down**

The major order of business in converting the old Woolworth, Rainbow and Lees buildings to an HOB venue was taking out 9,000-sf of Woolworth's first floor to open up room for two new floors, a music hall and a mezzanine seating area to accommodate 1,200. This meant building transfer beams and structural columns, handling the installation while performing the demolition. That concert space now be-



**RUSS & CO., INC.**

interior contractors

Alan Russ

915 Bassett Rd  
Westlake, OH 44145

Phone: (440) 835-2018  
Fax: (440) 835-1552

Proud to have worked with  
DAS Construction on the  
House of Blues  
project



Each House of Blues is unique. Here in Cleveland, the designers played up the city's ties to early rock and the Moon Dog parties of Alan Freed, seen now as the first rock concerts. Also specific to the city is an unusual amount of iron and steel within the building.

gins eight feet below street level, rising up 40 feet through the former first floor space. And mezza-

nine partyers are protected from falling by an ornate iron rail, HOB's first.

Molly Rose, the onsite project manager for owner's representative Idletime Network Inc., is a 30-year construction veteran with experience in four other HOB venues. This facility has the best concert hall of all the HOBs, with the best sound system and intimacy, she says.

The restaurant portion of the HOB was built into the Rainbow building, with an entrance off newly thriving E. 4<sup>th</sup> St. Here, D-A-S met its biggest challenge, as the long-unoccupied early 1900s building began to fall apart when work had begun on it. "The brick and mortar had deteriorated," says D-A-S project manager Scott Rauch.

A new building was basically built inside the old space, with a new foundation and structural steel supports, while keeping the site operational for construction crews. Local ironworkers took up the challenge of delivering a three-week job in only five days. "All the trades went above and beyond," says Scully.

"This HOB has the best functioning kitchen in the chain," adds Rose. She notes that Ohio's historic preservation office protected the E. 4<sup>th</sup> St. façade, so HOB has to do without a restaurant vestibule.

Meanwhile, the collapse of the building meant a mezzanine waiting area for the restaurant had to be foregone. HOB instead created two floors above the restaurant for the Foundation Room, a high-end club for members, whose construction is ongoing.

Below the structure is one level of parking, with two more on the roof. The close confines of the construction site, with access to work centering off E. 4<sup>th</sup> St. to allow Euclid to remain clear, were a challenge. As with most urban construction, there was precious little room to stockpile supplies and no room for cranes.

In the meantime, the city was working to transform E. 4<sup>th</sup> St. into a one-way street with new lighting and sidewalks.

### House is a rockin'

But it is perhaps the interior design work that stands out the most. "We are the largest procurement and display entity in outsider folk art," says Scully. "When we started collecting it, no one had heard of it."

Each of the venues has its own unique collection. "The artwork is an expression of our identity," says Scully. "It should be playful and fun, and something you can't totally appreciate on just the first visit."

Cooper Carry did the interior design work, says Lowry. HOB's staff of contract artists, headed by Holly Mandot, was in charge of scenic art and came in to finish the interior surfaces with their own unique designs.

HOB's Joe Perra was in charge of decorative woodwork, created in New Orleans. Under di-



Overlooking the concert stage are two private party rooms, each with its own unique decor.

rection from Scott Smith, in charge of purchasing and placement of folk art, specially chosen artifacts

from the New Orleans warehouse were brought in to finish the look. It took artists from the Big Easy

two months to create the designs on the walls and ceilings.

"Scheduling all of that was a fast-paced effort," says Rauch. The space is fully loaded, with décor items everywhere, requiring a multitude of specialty contractors.

With all those people working in the same space at the same time, careful coordination was essential, says Scully. D-A-S handled coordination with the subs, who all seemed to need to be there in the same four-month period.

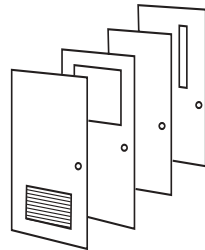
The venue demands state-of-the-art light and sound equipment. The audio, visual and lighting load is substantial, says Rauch, giving the electricians a lot to do. For instance, the venue has 69 monitors throughout, so everyone can always see what's on the main stage.



**Supplier of the Hollow Metal Doors & Frames, Wood Doors, Acoustical Doors, and Builders Hardware for the House of Blues**

- Quick Ship programs available
- No job too large or too small
- Over 20 years of experience

**PH: 440 942-3478  
FAX: 440 942-5945**



**Nice working with DAS Construction & good luck to the**

**House of Blues**

Thank you, MRN, LTD

**Craig S. Cohen P.E.**  
**Structural Engineering**

Three Commerce Park Square  
Suite 200  
23230 Chagrin Boulevard  
Beachwood, OH 44122-5495

Phone: 216.763.2505  
Fax: 216.464.2062

e-mail: CSPE@aol.com

**Complete Installation and Refinishing of Commercial Hardwood Flooring**

- Complete Bowling Lane Service
- Specializing in Residential & Commercial Installation & Refinishing



**Bowling Service & Supply Inc.**  
and

*M.S. & Son*

**HARDWOOD FLOORING**

P.O. Box 360886 • Strongsville, Ohio 44136  
**(440) 236-5135**

### Bring it on home

According to Lowry, the entire project went forward in two years, an aggressive schedule and one that had to be adhered to. With concert venues, it takes time to set up the performance schedules. "You're always afraid you're not going to open on time, so you make an extra effort," he says.

Adds Scully, "The schedule is the driving factor, the Holy Grail. But the pros we deal with are used to a time frame."

Rauch, whose part of the project lasted just eight months, says it beat the original opening day estimate of March 2005, opening in November 2004. D-A-S worked overtime, fast tracking materials orders. But it was worth it, he says. "It was most satisfying to see the HOB operations people. They knew what they wanted to create and you could see

## Project specs: House of Blues

**Developer:** MRN Ltd.

**Architect:** Cooper Carry

**General contractor:** D-A-S Construction

**Timeline:** Two years from planning to finish, construction, 8 months

**Size:** 50,000-sf

#### Vendors:

- Advance Door
- Anderson Industrial Construction (masonry)
- Ballast Fence
- BaMedia/City Design (lighting design)
- Bowling Service & Supply (hardwood floors)
- Berkshire Construction Co. (demo.)

■ C.I.R. Plumbing

■ Carrol Glass

■ City Architecture (code consultant)

■ Columbia Building Products (steel)

■ Corcoran Time & Marble

■ Crain S. Cohen Structural Engineer

■ Denk Assoc. Inc. (mechanical, electric engineers)

■ Edwards Technologies (project coordinator and engineer; audio, visual, lighting)

■ Enterprise Door & Supply Co.

Floreline Midwest

■ Geauga Mechanical (sheet metal)

■ Gratton Building Specialties

■ Idletime Network Inc. (owner's rep)

■ Lucci & Assoc. (electrical engineer)

■ Northcoast Mechanical

■ OA Bertin Co.

■ Porvasnik Painting

■ Quits Etc. (curtain fabrication and installation)

■ Ruccella Construction Co

■ Russ & Co. Inc.

■ TriMarkRaygal Inc. (kitchen, bar equipment)

■ Ullman Electric (electrical)

■ Uzun & Case (structural engineer for demo)

their pride in it."

Rose adds, "It was phenomenal how quickly it got done, mostly because of Rick

Maron. He was out there working with everyone."

"The end result," says Scully, "is that we worked through

the problems, and the building does what it is supposed to do."

And that's to let that boy (and girl) boogie-woogie. **BXM**

# COLUMBIA BUILDING PRODUCTS

*is proud to have worked on the*  
**House of Blues**  
*project*

With **DAS** Construction

STRUCTURAL STEEL  
& MISCELLANEOUS IRON

**440.235.3363**

Fax: 440.235.3372

25961 ELM STREET • OLMSTED FALLS, OH 44138

# Northcoast Mechanical

*"Proud to be a part of the*  
**House of Blues**  
*project with DAS"*

**3896 Myrtle Lane  
Brunswick, OH 44212**

**330.558.0089** (phone)

**330.558.0007** (fax)