599 LEXINGTON AVENUE GROUND FLOOR UPGRADES HONORED WITH IALD AWARD OF EXCELLENCE
LIGHTING DESIGN BY TILLOTSON DESIGN ASSOCIATES

PHILADELPHIA, PA USA, 10 MAY | Luminaries of the lighting profession gathered at the Crystal Tea Room on 10 May to honor the winners of the 34th Annual International Association of Lighting Designers (IALD) International Lighting Design Awards. Twenty-two projects from eight countries were on display – including interiors, monuments, façades, museums, and a residence. This year’s winners represent some of the most innovative and inspiring work found anywhere in the world of architectural lighting design.

Ground floor upgrades to 599 Lexington Avenue in New York, NY USA, with lighting design by Tillotson Design Associates, took home an Award of Excellence, accepted in person by Suzan Tillotson, IALD; Mitul Parekh; and Shan Jiang, Associate IALD.

Originally completed in 1986, 599 Lexington Avenue is a modernist 47-story building. The client felt the lobbies needed an update to attract new tenants, but the architect preferred original architecture to be respected, turning the project into a lighting intervention. The exterior canopy and the north face made it challenging to achieve the client’s desire for daytime street presence. Further complicating the scope, the rear wall of the lobby had a large bas-relief artwork. The final lighting solutions provide a refreshingly clean modern look to the lobby, respectful of architecture and noticeable from the street in daylight.

The 50’ high lobby glass façade showed reflections both during daytime and evening; the north face and the extended canopy limited the daylight penetration which exacerbated the daytime contrast problem. A large commissioned bas-relief artwork on the rear wall needed controlled high level illumination for it to pop.

Besides an updated security desk and a new plasterboard ceiling, the architect did not want to make any other changes to the original architecture. The polished stone walls did not catch light with wall grazing and showed reflections with wall washing, suggesting that a luminous ceiling was necessary to illuminate vertical surfaces. A backlit ceiling was neither feasible nor appropriate for the architecture.

As a solution, Tillotson Design Associates conceived of a series of suspended vertical fins with appropriate luminosity – this blended with the architecture, providing a connection to the existing façade fins, and filled the lobby volume with light. Edge-lit with linear dimmable LED fixtures at top, the clear fin glass has a translucent frit providing a diaphanous appearance, allowing visibility through, and adding ingenuity to the concept of a luminous ceiling.
To punch the polished stone floor with light and add elements of sparkle, designers interspersed a grid of LED pendants between the fins, in a polished chrome finish that dematerialized them. This pendant vocabulary was extended into the lower height elevator lobbies. Smaller sized and appropriately scaled for the space, a close grid of these pendants enlivened these cavernous spaces, aiding in wayfinding and adding to the dynamic experience of tenants and visitors waiting for taxis.

One judge called this “a restrained but brilliant solution to a challenging collaborative problem.”

Designers accented the artwork with carefully placed LED framing projectors with custom gobos created in-situ. Though providing high illumination, they also limit the spill on the surrounding wall and minimize shadows on overlapping three dimensional surfaces.

Since lighting was the main tool in transforming the space, the process was highly collaborative. Though the basic lighting concepts were developed by the lighting designer, the placement, sizing and detailing of all lighting elements were determined together with the architect. Multiple iterative CAD studies, renderings, mock-ups and a physical model were reviewed together to finalize the arrangement of all lighting elements.

The modernized lobby provides a unique, lively and luminous experience not only to the building entrants but also to the outside pedestrians even on a bright sunny day. “Well done,” wrote one judge, “in revitalizing a space to contemporary expectations.”

The IALD Lighting Design Awards program, established in 1983, honors lighting projects that display high aesthetic achievement backed by technical expertise. A panel of award-winning lighting designers, architects and interior designers review the projects in a three-day, anonymous review process. Full information about the judging process can be found in the 34th Annual IALD Awards Call for Entries.

For complete details and high resolution photos of this year’s award-winning projects, visit iald.org/awards.

The International Association of Lighting Designers (IALD), established in 1969, is an international organization supporting a network of more than 1,300 lighting design professionals who satisfy its rigorous qualification process. Its members are distinguished by a unique blend of aesthetic and technical expertise, and operate at the highest level of integrity to create a better world through leadership and excellence in lighting design; to cultivate the universal acknowledgement and appreciation of the Power of Light in human life.