



PEARL STREET ARTS CENTER

2025 AIA Fort Wayne Design Awards

DESIGNED TO BUILD COMMUNITY THROUGH MUSIC

This project began with one guiding question: “How can we bring people together and build community through orchestral music?” Pearl Street Arts Center was envisioned as a hub of connection—linking performer and listener, teacher and student, and seasoned and emerging artists alike.

Located in the heart of the emerging Pearl District in downtown Fort Wayne, the Pearl Street Arts Center represents the transformation of a former industrial bakery into a vibrant hub for the arts community. This adaptive reuse project celebrates the intersection of history, creativity, and technology—providing a flexible environment that supports musicians, artists, and audiences alike.

ARCHITECT’S STATEMENT

Design Considerations, Limitations, & Solutions — The project’s most significant design challenge was converting an aging industrial shell into a modern, acoustically sensitive arts center located less than 100 feet from active railroad tracks. The design team addressed this through a rigorous acoustic isolation strategy, employing decoupled wall assemblies, floating floors, and vibration control systems to eliminate external noise and vibrations. Within the main performance space, the room’s natural acoustics are supplemented with an innovative electronic acoustic architecture system allows the room to simulate a wide range of environments—from intimate studio settings to the reverberant qualities of a grand concert hall or even the Grand Canyon—giving artists unprecedented flexibility to fit the rooms acoustics to the type of performance.

The building program was designed for around-the-clock activity. It accommodates performances for audiences up to 400 people, individual lessons, classroom learning, back-of-houses spaces to support the artists along with administrative spaces. Commissioned artwork from local artists animate the main concourse and gathering areas. Spatial flow and sightlines were carefully studied to foster interaction and discovery throughout the facility. A large window from the concourse into the main performance hall allows students and other visitors to the facility to get a view into rehearsals in the performance hall, fostering further connection.

Construction and Technical Systems — The adaptive reuse preserved much of the original masonry shell and precast concrete roof structure. New glazed openings onto the recently redesigned Pearl Street allow views into the activities of the arts center and provide views out from the main concourse to the vibrant streetscape. The interior design celebrates the building’s industrial past while introducing a new palette that matches and enhances the beauty of the art created within. New mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems were designed for both efficiency and precision environmental control. The HVAC system employs variable air volume (VAV) controls with ductwork that ensures quiet operation in acoustically sensitive areas. Humidity levels in the entire building are controlled to protect the traditional instruments played in the center. LED lighting throughout the facility offers adjustable color temperature and intensity to support varied performance and exhibition needs.

Sustainability and Special Considerations — Sustainable design principles guided every stage of the project. The adaptive reuse of the existing structure minimized material waste while preserving the historic fabric of the district. A photovoltaic array covers the roof, providing much of the electricity needed for the building and lowers the ongoing operation cost of the non-profit facility. High-performance insulation, energy-efficient glazing, and modern building systems reduce operational energy demands. Accessibility was a central design priority—entries, circulation paths, and stage access were designed to accommodate not only users with limited mobility but also performers moving large instruments or equipment. A universal restroom with an adult size changing table expands the usability of the facility. Wayfinding and signage incorporate braille along with QR codes that provide audible descriptions of art pieces. The resulting environment is inclusive, comfortable, and intuitive to navigate.

Impact & Vision — The Pearl Street Arts Center embodies the revitalization of downtown Fort Wayne’s Pearl District—honoring the area’s industrial past while shaping its creative future. By transforming a utilitarian industrial bakery into a place for the arts, the design connects people through shared experiences and artistic expression. Every aspect of the building—from its acoustic versatility to its welcoming, art-filled spaces—reflects the center’s mission to inspire all who enter, creating a place where creativity thrives and the community comes together through the universal language of art.

PROJECT INFORMATION

Submission Category — Interior Architecture (Project cost greater than \$5 million)

Project Type — Performance and Educational Center

Project Cost — \$18,500,000

Project Address — 234 Pearl St., Fort Wayne, IN 46802

Date of Substantial Completion — August 2024



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PEARL STREET ARTS CENTER

ARTS | EDUCATION
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

PEARL DISTRICT

234





BOARD ROOM



16

14

12

11

13

15

10





THE JUNE E. ENOCH AUDITORIUM





PEARL DISTRICT

PEARL DISTRICT

PEARL STREET ARTS CENTER

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BLUSTREAM

EXIT

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