

Cajun Rhythms Inspire the Vibrant Lights of Zydeco Grille

by Charles Linn, AIA

The staccato of a rapidly pumped accordion and the slashing steel riff of a washboard are the elements of traditional Cajun music that inspired Doreen LeMay Madden's lighting design for the Zydeco Grille in South Boston. "I tried to create a rhythm and a sense of harmony with the lighting," she says. "I feel very strongly that lighting, like music, is a universal language. It has a certain psychology behind it, and it shows people how to respond to a space." The Zydeco Grille is intended to be as spirited as the Louisiana music that inspired it, and Madden's gaily layered illumination of the restaurant makes its message clear: *laissez les bons temps rouler!*

On the front and side of the building, PAR38 uplights and MR16 downlights are hidden behind a corrugated, galvanized-steel fascia. The uplights wash the upper portion of the facade and signage, the undersides of the eaves, and a menacing life-size wooden alligator that appears to be crawling out of a pool of blue neon. The MR16s wash the sidewalk below. Traditional gooseneck fixtures with wavy-rimmed



The message Doreen LeMay Madden wanted to communicate with the layers of light in this replica of a tacked-together bayou bar is the same as that of Zydeco music: have fun! The underside of the bar is lined with intense horizon-blue neon, and the bar has custom pendants overhead. The walls, which are decorated with Louisiana artifacts, are bathed in light by a track of MR16s over the back bar.

Project: Zydeco Grille, South Boston

Owner: Jim Fagan

Architect: George Schnee Architects

Lighting designer:

-Doreen LeMay Madden



Sheet-metal pendants over tables have the letter Z cut into them. Clouds over the "alligator pond" are backlit by fluorescent tubes wrapped with blue gels. MR11s recessed into the clouds drop pools of starlight on the floor.

reflectors of galvanized steel bounce light onto the shiny fascia, and each column bears a custom-made sconce, with the letter Z cut out for the light to shine through.

On the interior walls, artifacts like a New Orleans street sign and a giant crayfish evoke the Bayou State, as does the "alligator pond," an overscale floor mosaic of one of the reptiles. Drywall "clouds" float over the pond, concealing 4100K fluorescent lamps wrapped in blue theatrical-gel material, which cast a sky blue across the ceiling. Recessed, chrome-trimmed MR11 downlights drop pools of light from the clouds onto the alligator mosaic, and the blue fluorescents shine through a slot in the bottom of each cloud.

To light tables and wash the walls, Madden put 12V MR11s on tracks around the perimeter. Away from the perimeter, black stem-mounted MR16s and cone-shaped, sheet-metal pendants with frosted G

lamps are used to provide ambient light for the tables and the half-height corrugated-steel partitions that divide the dining area. The Z cutouts that first appear in the sconces outside are repeated in the pendants. Madden responded to maintenance concerns by limiting the number of lamp types to seven, and dimming controls were used to lengthen lamp life and enable light levels to be easily altered. ■

Sources

- Fluorescent strips:** Columbia Lighting
- MR11 downlights:** Europhase
- Interior Z pendants:** Avalanche
- Low-voltage MR11 track:** Seagull
- Exterior MR11s:** Seagull
- MR16 monopoints:** Lightolier

Interior and exterior blue neon: Neon Williams Co.

- Exterior floods:** RAB
- Recessed exterior MR16s:** Lightolier
- Wall-mounted goosenecks:** Abolite
- Exterior Z sconces:** Ultralights
- Exit lighting:** Surelights