



Outstanding church interior a space to treasure

BY KARL KESSLER

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When we refer to “good architecture,” we usually mean that a building looks good on the outside. And yet, old or young, that beauty can be skin deep.

A building’s “soul” is its people; we are its inner life, on full display wherever we gather. Even so, inspiring interiors are rare.

Sometimes function forbids inspiration, or designers pour everything into outward appearances. Often, great architectural interiors are reworked over time, for taste or utility. But once in a while we find treasure at the heart of a place and are

invited to share.

Religion aside, few interiors better inspire wellbeing and delight than the best of those found in places of worship, and many of the finest secular interiors – libraries, great halls, rotundas, legislative chambers, museums, courts of justice, banks – use the same architectural vocabulary of the temple.

Designed by Detroit’s Spier, Rohns and Gehrke, the 1914 brick-and-stone exterior of St. Matthews Lutheran Church on Benton Street in Kitchener has just enough Gothic verticality to impress. But the 800-seat interior is the prize here, as excellent a public gathering space as it is a worship space.

Two transepts each hold a vast window,

allowing daylight from the floor to the high rib-vaulted ceiling. Original woodwork by Waterloo’s Globe Furniture adds warmth. The wrap-around gallery and the delicate original brass chandeliers are exquisite. The 3,000-pipe organ is among the largest in Canada.

St. Matthews is still full of life, but as we move away from large, traditional places of worship, we may lose many outstanding civic spaces. Thousands are closing; some are demolished. As they become rarer, let’s treasure the thoughtful gifts they are.

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