NORWICH CATHEDRAL

Exploring the spirituality of light

LUTRON

ENHANCE HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE WITH ETHEREAL ILLUMINATION

For centuries, the soaring volumes and historic details of Norwich Cathedral instilled visitors with a sense of awe and wonder. Then an outdated tungsten-halogen lighting system and its antiquated switching controls began to compromise the experience. Could a relighting effort restore it?

*"Light is associated with all that is good—illuminating, comforting. Our lighting project will bring new life to our cathedral—**enhancing its magnificent architecture**; providing the means to worship in new and imaginative ways"*

— The Very Revd. Jane Hedges, Dean of Norwich

OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

The lighting at Norwich Cathedral made the medieval masterpiece hard to appreciate. Architectural details—such as the historic roof bosses—disappeared in the shadows of the vaulted ceiling. The choir was dim and even gloomy. Glaring downlights washed the high altar and the nave in a bleaching, one-dimensional light. It was also difficult to enjoy the extraordinary stained-glass windows on a sunny day—the stark visual contrast of the brightness at the pane and the poorly lit interior made them hard to see.

*"Creating **layers of light that provide illumination** precisely where it is needed, when it is needed, requires both the right luminaires and the right lighting control system"*
— Mark Major, Director, Speirs Major

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*"Our aim with Norwich Cathedral was to achieve **'unselfconscious' lighting**. To achieve this, we created a lighting system that offered both flexibility and nuance"*
— Mark Major, Director, Speirs Major

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Award-winning lighting design practice Speirs Major led the relighting effort. The project encompassed all the interior areas of the cathedral, which included the nave, aisles, choir, crossing, presbytery, ambulatory, six chapels, two ancillary rooms, and a historic library.

Design Goals:

- Amplify existing beauty of the cathedral
- Improve electrical infrastructure to facilitate broader use of the space for community events, concerts, and tourist visits
- Reduce energy usage and carbon footprint of the church
- Enhance safety for visitors, parishioners, and maintenance personnel

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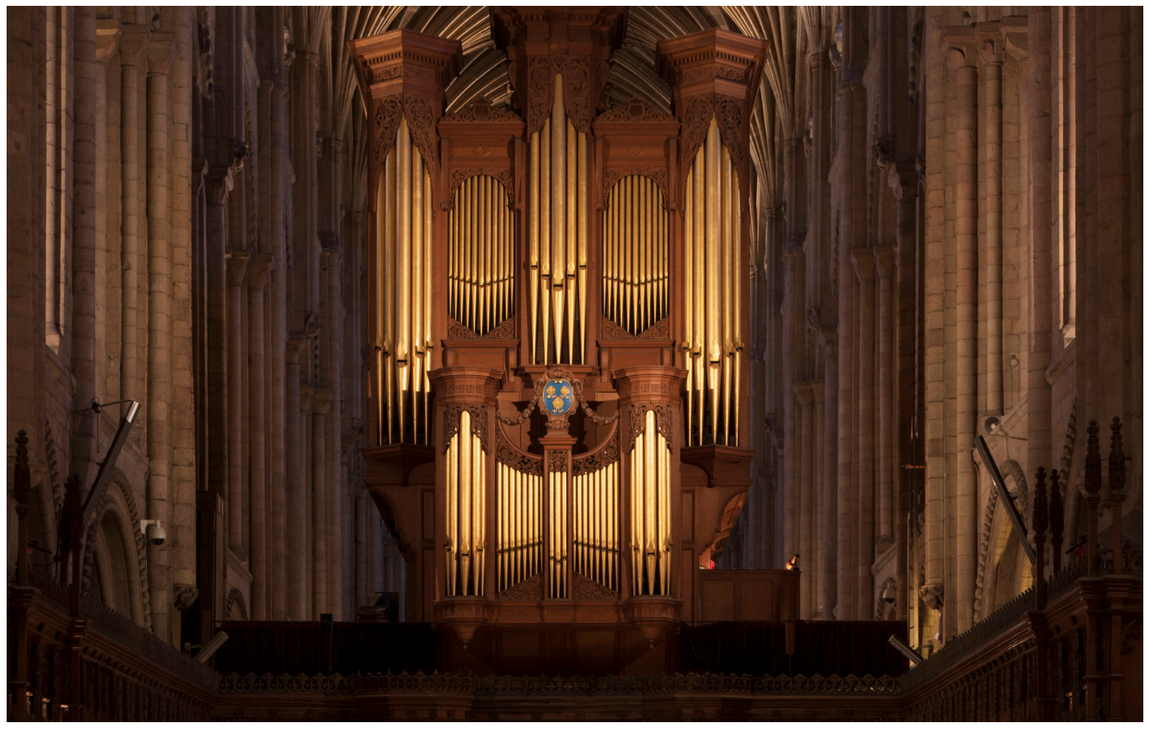
SUBTLE LIGHT.
ETHEREAL GLOW.

Speirs Major strategically updated the lighting system to showcase the incredible features, textures, and materials found throughout the cathedral.

New luminaires wash the limestone walls in light, creating a warm ethereal glow and highlighting the liturgical elements—altars, lecterns, fonts—and other objects of cultural significance contained throughout the church. Soft uplighting expresses the soaring volumes and sculptural forms in the vaulted ceiling. In the choir, modern candle luminaires and additional ambient lighting brighten the 15th century oak misericordias, while another lighting element enhances the presence of the carved woodwork on the choir stalls. New luminaires also frame the stained-glass windows, enabling people to admire the panes comfortably, even on a bright day.



*"Having a **good quality, intuitive, and reliable control system** was very important to the success of the project"*

— Mark Major, Director, Speirs Major

EVERY MASS, EVERY MOMENT, MAGICALLY LIT

Imagine: It's Christmas Eve and time for Midnight Mass at Norwich Cathedral. Areas of the church remain quite dim, as parishioners take their seats in the nave. The unlit arcade feels cavernous, but the golden glow in the triforium above it pulls worshippers' gaze upward. The impressive architectural details of the historic vault are just visible in the faintly illuminated ceiling. The interior feels somber, and yet the glint off the pipes of the organ promises something special.

As the procession begins, the light level rises, providing a clear and well-illuminated path to the altar. Crisp white light enhances the festive holiday décor. Throughout the Mass, the focal point shifts to the presbytery for prayers and Scripture readings and returns to the stone pulpit for a homily delivered by The Very Revd. Jane Hedges, Dean of Norwich. Regardless of where it is located, every moment is well-illuminated, without being over-lit, for viewers watching in-person or live-streaming the service from home.

The magic at Norwich Cathedral is not limited to the larger celebrations. It happens every day. Meditating in St. Catherine's chapel. Taking in a roof boss prayer walk. Enjoying one of the organ recitals or choir performances. It doesn't matter why a person visits this historic space, but the experience will be illuminating.

AWARD-WINNING PROJECT

In 2020, this exceptional lighting design won an IALD Award of Excellence from the International Association of Lighting Designers and, in 2021, was named the [d]arc award winner of the Places—Best Interior Lighting Scheme in the High Budget category.

IALD
AWARD OF EXCELLENCE
RE-LIGHTING OF THE INTERIOR OF NORWICH CATHEDRAL

AL LIGHT & ARCHITECTURE
2020 DESIGN AWARDS

[d]arc awards
CELEBRATING THE BEST IN LIGHTING DESIGN

SPEIRS MAJOR

Speirs Major is an independent, award-winning, international design practice. Over their more than twenty-five year history, their team has completed hundreds of projects around the world ranging from lighting masterplans to pocket parks, major civic buildings to small community spaces; from airports and bridges to cathedrals and monuments. Meet the team members from Speirs Major behind the relighting Norwich Cathedral.

“Whilst our passion is light, shadow and darkness also play a huge role in our work.”

Mark Major
SENIOR PARTNER

"Light is transformative, it impacts ambience from expansive and vast to intimate, small, and contemplative.
Light creates architecture."

Phillip Rose
ASSOCIATE PARTNER

“I believe that light can completely change the perception of a space, and is an essential element in any project.”

Martin Firera Alessandri
3D DESIGN LEAD

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Project Name: Relighting Norwich Cathedral's Interior
Location: Norwich, U.K.
Project Size: 3,450 square meters (approximately 37,100 square feet)
Photographer: James Newton
Lighting control system: Quantum

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