



### Case Study Highlights

**Product** *Stellar® 216*

**Quantity** 823 seats (624 orchestra, 199 balcony)

**Location** The campus of Herbert W. Armstrong College in Edmond, Oklahoma

**Architect** Rees Associates, Inc.

**Construction Cost** \$20 million

**Dimensions** 44,775 square feet (13,647 square meters) 80 feet (24 meters) at highest point

**Inaugural Concert** September 5, 2010

**Contact** [www.armstrongauditorium.org](http://www.armstrongauditorium.org)

## American Seating Plays a Leading Role in the New Armstrong Auditorium modeled after the Ambassador in Pasadena.

### New Seats Honor the Past, Provide a Legacy for the Future.

The Ambassador Auditorium in Pasadena, California, has been called the “Carnegie Hall of the West” since opening in 1974. Considered a national treasure, legends such as Leonard Bernstein and Beverly Sills have graced the stage – while dignitaries and celebrities have enjoyed performances in the comfort and elegance of American Seating seats.

In the mid-1990s, the Ambassador Auditorium and its owner, Ambassador College, closed; however, the auditorium has since reopened with new owners and now continues to serve as an ageless entertainment icon.

Meanwhile, in Edmond, Oklahoma, the college has been resurrected and a new performance hall built in the spirit of Ambassador College’s founder, Herbert W. Armstrong. Once again, American Seating is part of the Armstrong history with new seating that matches the timeless elegance and durability of its predecessor.

American Seating is proud to mark a new chapter with the Armstrong cultural legacy.

### A Crown Jewel for the Midwest

About the time that Ambassador College was closing, one of its alumni, Gerald R. Flurry, formed the Armstrong International Cultural Foundation. A few years later, in 2001, he founded the Herbert W. Armstrong College.

The college is located on 171 acres just north of Oklahoma City where dormitory and educational facilities have begun to populate the former farm field. A crowning moment in the past few years has been the construction of a performance hall.

In September 2010 – after four years of planning and two years of construction – the Armstrong Auditorium opened on the campus to much fanfare. The facility’s architecture brilliantly honors the elegance and significance of its “parent” performance hall in Pasadena. The finest-quality materials and products, imported from around the world, adorn the interior. Some of the hall’s treasures are from the original Ambassador Auditorium, including a Steinway concert grand piano and two Baccarat crystal candelabra. Other amenities include Swarovski-trimmed chandeliers from Austria, Persian onyx, marble from Spain and the finest-quality custom seats made by American Seating in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

### The Vision: A World-Class Venue

When Gerald Flurry shared his vision for a new auditorium, he wanted the space to equal the aesthetics and acoustics of the original performance hall while making its own mark as an emerging international icon. Quality – not cost – was the No. 1 consideration as Flurry and his architectural, design and facilities management team evaluated options.

“We were looking for the best products on the market; we wanted to emulate the standard set at the Ambassador Auditorium in Pasadena,” said Roger Brandon, Armstrong College’s facilities manager.

The architect, Rees Associates, Inc., had already begun the process of designing the new facility and specifying various furnishings when a reconnaissance visit to the Pasadena auditorium revealed that the seats there had been made by American Seating.

“When we saw first-hand the craftsmanship and durability, we wanted to get American Seating involved,” Brandon said.

*Continued on Page 3...*



A

### Project Partner List and Sources for this Article

- Chad Neeley, LEED AP, Project Manager, American Seating
- Shane Granger, Marketing Director, Armstrong International Cultural Foundation
- Rick Lowe, The Lowe Group
- Roger Brandon, Facilities Manager, Armstrong College

*A: Custom seating provides unique experience in the orchestra level.*

American Seating Sales Representative Rick Lowe got a call from Brandon: “He asked, ‘Can you still make a chair as good as this one?’ And I said, ‘We sure can.’”

Lowe, Brandon, Armstrong’s Marketing Director Shane Granger, American Seating Project Manager Chad Neeley and others on the team met to discuss the project. The discussion included not only the type of chair and how many were required but also the footprint of the performance hall and considerations such as multiple aisles and levels.

Ultimately, American Seating won the project bid.

“Our client knew what they wanted,” Neeley said, “Our challenge was to bring their vision to life.”

**The Decision: Quality, Beauty, Sustainability**

In addition to the logic in choosing the original manufacturer who knew the seats best, there were several additional considerations in selecting American Seating.

One determining factor was that the seats at the Ambassador had stood the test of time. Since the mid-1970s, more than 2 million people had sat in those seats, and they still have decades of use left in them. They are also easy to maintain. And, as it turned out, they would be fairly easy to replicate.

The seat standards (vertical support) at the Pasadena auditorium are made of cast-iron – a heavier, much more durable option than steel, the material that other vendors were recommending to the Armstrong client.

“We looked at what the competition offered, but the fact is cast iron for the seats’ footing construction is better quality than steel,” Granger said.

American Seating product *Stellar*® 216 provided a close match to the original seats and offered cast-iron footings. The *Stellar* product line is highly customizable, stylish and tough-performing in auditoriums, theaters, lecture halls and sports venues.

“Beneath its elegant exterior is a rock-solid frame that we’ve tested to stand decades of use,” Neeley said.

The client also liked that the seats are deep and wide, with customizable options to enhance the luxuriousness of the seating. The A.D.A.-compliant seat offers widths up to 23 inches and a selection of aisle treatments, plus a wide variety of colors, fabrics, woods and patterns.

“Our customizations included padded armrests. We also wanted very specific fabric colors and an elegant yet durable laminate for the seats’ backing. All of these details have a huge impact on a patron’s experience. The seating had to rise to the level of a world-class facility,” Granger said. “Frankly, we were a very demanding client, but American Seating was easy to work with, and the results are phenomenal.”

**Collaboration, Creation, Culmination**

To achieve these results, American Seating worked closely with the Armstrong team to create several prototypes before proceeding with manufacturing the seats.

Selecting an American company that manufactures in the United States wasn’t a requirement; however, Brandon and others involved appreciated the ability to communicate easily and quickly and see fast turnaround on requests.

*Continued on Page 4...*



B: Ambassador’s original Steinway is among many of Armstrong’s treasures.  
 C: The original Ambassador design was closely replicated.

"American Seating was not the lowest cost, but I think the quality of the product speaks for itself," Brandon said.

The prototype went through several iterations. "A few features required modification to meet their request for a sleek, comfortable look with minimal maintenance," explained American Seating Product Engineer Troy DeVlieger.

Among these modified features: creating upholstered aisle panels that fully encapsulate the end standard and still allow for a light housing with no visible fasteners.

"From an aesthetics standpoint, the architect wanted a really clean, modern look on the panels; from a maintenance standpoint, I wanted to be able to easily change the light bulbs," Brandon said.

Working with American Seating's samples team, DeVlieger and Neeley developed a solution in which the panel was modified to allow access to the light housing from the inside face of the panel while maintaining the fully upholstered look on all sides.

The client also wanted a different seat back than what is usually specified with the *Stellar 216*. The seat normally features a rectilinear wood outer back. Wood is good – but on the backs of chairs, it's not always lasting. A wood laminate, on the other hand, lasts a very long time and is virtually maintenance-free. The chosen laminate exudes elegance and complements the performance hall's cherry-wood walls.

Finally, the architect's design called for specific fabrics and colors. On paper, the choices seemed radical: a soft gold for orchestra-level seating and a regal purple for the carpet; on the balcony level, a deep crimson for the seats and a gold carpet that matched the color of the seats on the orchestra level. The gold for the seats was a custom color that required several takes. It was worth it: Installed, the result is sublime.

It's also sustainable. Because the client chose the industry leader for durability, the seats will remain in use for years to come, thus reducing the cost, energy, resources and materials needed to repair or replace a product of lesser quality. A longer-lasting product also reduces the burden on landfills. *Stellar* can contribute to multiple LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) credits. The product contains more than 50 percent recycled content. Additionally, American Seating can provide FSC (Forestry Stewardship Council)-certified cores and accessories, and no added UF (urea-formaldehyde) resins.

Remarkable for the symmetry of its proportions and the beauty of its décor, the auditorium has already become the Midwestern jewel that Flurry envisioned. It is on its way to becoming a venue of international renown. Recently, it hosted the Russian National Ballet Theatre's *Swan Lake* to a sellout crowd.

"Our patrons gasped when they entered the hall," Granger said. "The facility is simply stunning. We wanted the best we could afford to offer a world-class experience. American Seating came through with world-class seating."

*Photos provided by the Armstrong Auditorium and the Ambassador Auditorium.*



D: Brilliant architecture of the Armstrong Auditorium honors the elegance of the Ambassador Auditorium.  
E: Crimson fabric on the seating and gold carpet create exceptional results.