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ARTISTS AND ARTISANS FOR OVER HALF A CENTURY

# Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart Houston, TX



## OVERVIEW

Realizing that his archdiocese had long outgrown the original Co-Cathedral in Galveston and in Houston, Archbishop Emeritus Joseph Fiorenza (while serving as Archbishop of Galveston-Houston) selected Rohn & Associates Design, Inc. to develop the new Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral in downtown Houston. Rolf and his team, a trusted name in liturgical environments, worked closely with Archbishop Fiorenza, Father Troy Gately and Bishop Rizzotto to create the vision of a more traditional and liturgically correct environment where space, furnishings, appointments, architectural, iconographic and devotional imagery work in harmony to inspire all who enter. This colossal yet gracious contemporary Neo-Italian Romanesque space is a 37,000 square-foot marvel that has seating for 1,820 people and is situated over a two-block expanse. The construction took five years to develop and construct.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

For five years, the Rohn team worked exclusively with the aforementioned Diocesan Liturgical Committee chaired by Archbishop Emeritus Joseph Fiorenza to create an inspiring and harmonious liturgical and artistic environment. Rolf's team was responsible for the design and construction of each assembly space including the sanctuary, all devotional spaces, wood-carved saints, a massive white Carrara image of the Sacred Heart, Immaculate Conception images, leaded art glass, bronze Stations of the Cross, marble liturgical furniture and bronze appointments.

## PROJECT EXECUTION

The Catholic faith is elevated to a blend of art, architecture, celebration and meditation in this heavenly space. With no columns to obstruct views, entire liturgies, devotional and architectural accents, extraordinary art glass, statuary, decorative pendentives and art are all clearly visible due to unencumbered sightlines. Rolf and his team designed a worship environment that resonates with a sense of holiness—and tempers the more modern structure with a traditional heroic interior setting. Simply, it is an exquisite and majestic tribute to God and his people of the Houston Catholic faith.

- Just above the great entrance, a larger-than-life 20-foot stained glass Resurrection window of Jesus Christ greets downtown visitors from the highway with a welcoming glow that showers the city of Houston.
- Despite the fortitude of the exterior of the Co-Cathedral and campanile, which rises high above neighboring buildings at nearly six stories tall, the interior yields a surprising lightness and traditional feel. Rolf accented the minimalist and spacious interior with 30,000 square feet of well-lit marble finishes and furnishings, complementing the carvings and textured background accents.
- Rolf donated the gilding of the three 18' crosses of the roof and campanile, which have two layers of 23-karat gold applications.
- As you make your way through the majestic 16' doors, eyes immediately focus on the three 20-ton white Carrara marble upper door transoms reflecting the early missionaries and bishops of the Houston Archdiocese. Centered and pulling the scene together is a sculptured image of Christ the King.



- The inlaid marble flooring reflects the Christian Journey in Italian beige and green marble. Starting at the entrance, it leads from the gathering space down a gracious center aisle, around a large marble “living water” baptismal font centered in the seating area and up to a welcoming sanctuary of precious marbles. The solid oak pews and frontals custom designed for the space create comfortable and dignified seating.
- The building’s cruciform shape visually elevates the altar at the center of the crossing, providing a direct line of focus of liturgical celebrations and worship. Latin American saints, including St. Juan Diego, adorn the side altars, and at each side of the transepts (the side tips of the cross) are the Blessed Virgin and the Sacred Heart.
- At the rear of the Sanctuary and behind the center of the altar is the 9’ Passion of Christ carved in antiqued Linden wood and mounted on an 18’ cross. Behind the apse is a golden carved wall reflecting on Christ’s death and ascension into Heaven. The image draws each congregant’s focus to the altar table.
- 8’ full-round statues of St. Joseph & child Jesus, St. Elizabeth Seton, St. Anthony, St. San Juan Diego, St. Martin de Porres and St. Terese of Lisieux (the Little Flower) are set into eight multi-colored marble shrines. The 4’ x 7’ x 18” high relief Stations of the Cross were designed and fabricated in Rohn’s Pittsburgh studios. At the far end of the transepts are full-round, floating 10’ white Carrara statues of the Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Conception. Each of these impressive pieces weighs over 20 tons.
- Liturgical furniture, altar, ambo, tabernacle base, and details are fabricated from Ethiopian Rosa Diaspora marble, which took over six months to quarry. The marble was then transported by boat to Italy, where each piece was meticulously fabricated. Upon completion, they made the journey to their new home in Houston, Texas, for installation. The Cathedra Chair and other furniture are constructed of superior Northern Oak with bronze accents.
- The interior crossing of the vaulted ceilings features a magnificent 100’ diameter dome comprised of hand-painted glass of the 12 Apostles topped with an inspiring 8-foot oculus backlight depicting the Holy Spirit with the seven gifts in stained glass.
- There are 108 stained glass windows with numerous depictions of the angels and saints. Each window has meticulously beveled, diamond-like accents that produce a rainbow of colors to flood the interior.
- A new world-class Pasi Opus XIX pipe organ (whose 5,499 pipes range in size from ½ inch to 32 feet and with four key-boards, one foot pedal and 75 stop knobs) was installed. It harmoniously works with the architectural design of the building to enhance acoustics and provide an inspirational experience for all who come and worship. This marks the first pipe organ the Archdiocese has installed in a quarter of a century. There is also a soaring loft to provide adequate space for an entire choir or orchestra.

## COMPLETED PROJECT

The award-winning Houston Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart is simply a breathtaking contemporary Romanesque Cathedral for 21st century worship. It is a beautiful space that embraces Catholic tradition that permeates a reverence for God. Now complete, this extraordinary place of worship serves as the perfect sacred environment for the Cardinal to celebrate all the major masses, including ordinations, the Chrism Mass, Christmas and Easter vigils, as well as daily Mass. It also provides a wonderful respite from the busy city and serves as an outstanding addition to the city of Houston.

## RECOGNITION FROM CATHEDRAL LEADERSHIP

“This glorious Cathedral will stand as a powerful symbol of the transcendence of God, and as an affirmation of the existence and importance of faith in a secular and disbelieving world. The Cathedral will serve as a soul and conscience of the city, reminding us of the importance of the spiritual amid the bustle of the commercial and corporate worlds - of the fact that God exists and faith matters.” — Archbishop Emeritus Joseph A. Fiorenza, *Texas Catholic Herald*

“Harmonious ornamentation achieved through multiple symmetries nourishes our senses and creates in us a healing state. As human beings, we always anthropomorphize our gods, and expect that they share our own higher pleasures. For this reason, our love of God moves us to ornament the place where we worship, and to do so in a totally selfless manner. We wish to create an environment of maximal transcendent pleasure using an understanding that arises from our own physical experience. Most important, I see a fundamental humility in the Houston Cathedral, quite a feat expressed in such a large and imposing building, and in my mind, this modesty is closer to the early Church doctrine.” — Dr. Nikos Salingaros, *Ciessa Oggi, edition # 87*







