

Culture

Royal Shakespeare Theatre

Architects: Bennetts Associates

Client: Royal Shakespeare Company

Project completion: 2010

Context

In 2004 the RSC announced its ambition to create a modern interpretation on the courtyard theatres of Shakespeare's day, transforming the relationship between artists and audiences by creating a thrust stage within the existing listed 1932 Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

Key elements of the scheme included a new auditorium, seating over 1,000 people; restoration of the key Art Deco elements; a riverside walkway enhancing access to the river and gardens; improved facilities, including a rooftop restaurant and two new café/bars, foyers linking the Royal Shakespeare and Swan Theatres; more and better toilets and upgraded back of house facilities.

A theatre tower marks the new entrance, providing accessible circulation to all parts of the building and unrivalled views across Stratford while a public square, provides a meeting place and outdoor stage.

David Bonnett Associates (DBA) was involved from inception until the important post-completion stage, advising on overall strategy and detailed design as well as ongoing management arrangements after project completion.

Based on the principle of Inclusive Design the theatre provides easy access for able bodied and disabled patrons, performers, stagehands and staff.

The design approach minimises the need for special features or gadgets, for example the slightly raised entrance way, as well as the stage are both approached by cleverly designed ramps, to the benefit of all. A proportion of the seats in the theatre have been specially designed to fold flat when the space is required by wheelchair users, ensuring maximum flexibility within the auditorium.

A significant innovation in the use of passenger lifts as part of the emergency escape strategy, by adopting 'smart' alarm technology.

Pictures



Image courtesy of English Heritage



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