

# the **ASTIC** letter

The Newsletter of the **AMERICAN SOCIETY OF THEATRE CONSULTANTS**

## Lobbies We Know and Love

Do you remember your first Broadway show in the Big Apple? Do you remember the crush of humanity at five minutes before curtain time and again at intermission? Do you remember feeling like a driver in a demolition derby as you made your way through the lobby to get to the restroom, which was most probably located in the basement? Forget trying to find a water fountain, or a public telephone, or standing any closer than five people back in the concession line with the lobby lights flashing. Broadway lobbies are tiny. Broadway is one end of our yardstick for determining how to program and design new theatre lobbies.

Square footage and street frontage were at a premium in New York City, even a hundred years ago. An analysis of lobby size relative to seat count in typical Broadway theatres tells us that a Broadway lobby and its sense of magnificent compression is based on roughly 2 to 3 net square feet (NSF) per auditorium seat. If a Broadway theatre lobby is one bookend in square footage allowance, the other bookend is the lobby of the Meyerson Concert Hall in Dallas, which provides an abundant 25 square feet per audience seat. This range of 2 square feet to 25 square feet per seat provides theatre consultants and architects a context within which to make the judgment call on how big a lobby should be for a particular project. These recommendations are usually communicated through the initial space program prepared by the

theatre consultant.

The typical space program is a two-dimensional guide to a three-dimension puzzle. Theatre consultants stand ready to make recommendations to owners and users on how best to program and design lobbies and their associated spaces. Determining the programmed size of a lobby depends on factors that include the qualitative basis and expectations of the owner, financial guidelines, additional lobby functions, site restrictions, circulation flows, the num-

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ber of lobby levels, and access into and out of the auditorium. Performing arts centers in Tampa, Cincinnati, Newark, Ft. Lauderdale, West Palm Beach and Fort Worth have lobbies that range from 10 NSF per audience seat to 16 NSF per seat. The lobbies of theatres and concert halls on college and university campuses tend to have tighter square foot assignments ranging from 8 to 12 square feet per seat, although exceptions do exist. Projects with very tight budgets that require bare minimum space allocations may choose to program their lobbies at austere Broadway lobby levels or just above, resulting in a range of 4 to 6 NSF

per audience seat. This is not a case of one lobby size fits all.

An important distinction must be made between lobby space and circulation space when programming, designing and cost estimating the lobby space for a performing arts facility. Lobby space is the area where the audience can assemble for pre-show and intermission. Public circulation is the space required for access corridors to the auditorium, emergency exit stairs and corridors, staircases between lobby levels, and

other areas whose function is to accommodate the movement of the audience between the lobby and the auditorium or emergency exits. Public circulation is often programmed as a separate space allowance and not included in the square footage assigned to the lobby. Rules-of-thumb suggest that an allowance of 5 to 6 NSF per seat

is appropriate for programming public circulation space, in addition to the programmed lobby space.

While choosing the right lobby space allocation is important, it is equally important to include the optimum mix of additional spaces that support the front-of-house operations of the theatre. Support spaces that are frequently found as part of the lobby include the box office, public restrooms and concessions areas. Additional lobby amenities include foyer and weather vestibule, coat check, hearing-assist rental, house manager's office, program

*(See Lobbies, page 2)*

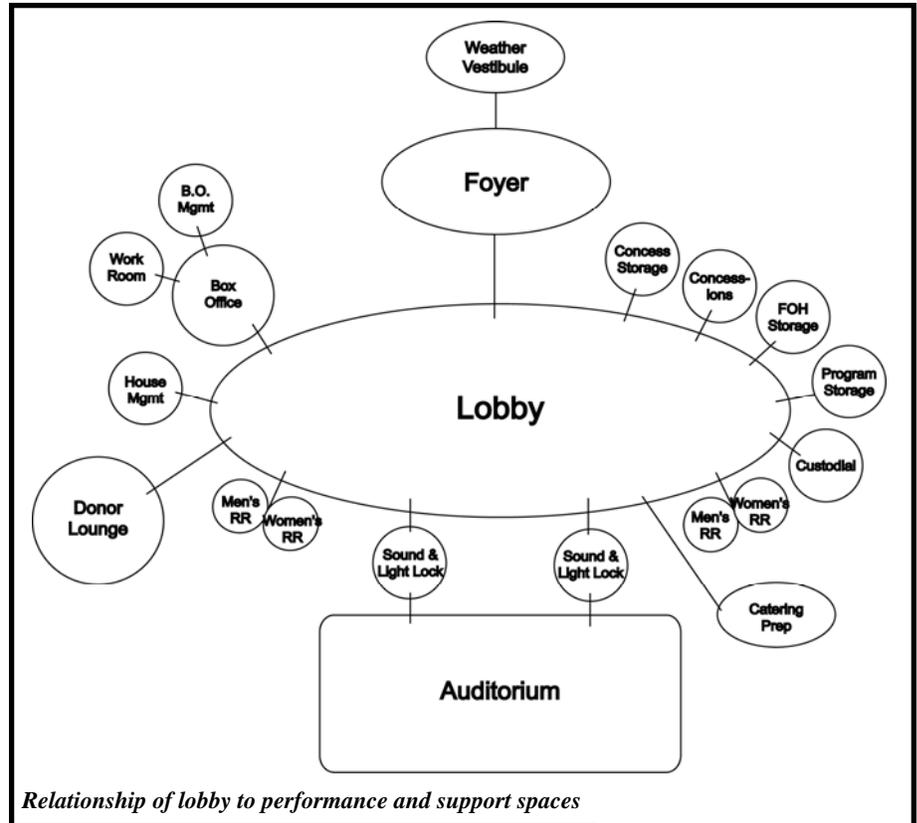
(Lobbies, continued from page 1)

storage, front-of-house furniture storage, gift shop, concession storage, First-Aid station, and usher changing rooms. Donor's lounges, VIP rooms, and Founder's rooms are often included in the assignment of public spaces.

Public lobbies of performing arts facilities are often called upon to support large receptions, sit-down dinners, business meetings, weddings, and other social and rental events not associated with the function of the auditorium. These functional requirements have a significant effect on the planning and design of the lobby, as well as the type of support spaces required. It is becoming standard practice to include warming kitchens, cool storage rooms and food staging areas to support efficient catering operations, which in turn can bring in additional revenue for the facility.

The layout of the lobby is affected by factors that include the patron drop-off and entrance sequence, the location of the box office, the location of auditorium entrance and exit doors, ticket-taking arrangements, vertical circulation including staircases and elevators, the number of lobby levels, and the location of the additional front-of-house support spaces. The location of public parking has a large impact on the design of the lobby. Theatre consultants can assist architects in the design of effective lobbies by examining the arrival sequence of audience members from the primary parking locations.

The lobby of a theatre or concert hall offers one of the first and most important impressions to the performing arts patron. Ease of access, safety, and comfort are important elements in the patron's experience with the facility. The lobby should be designed to provide a safe and efficient arrival area for school children awaiting a special matinee performance, while at the same time providing sufficient seating for elderly patrons and others who might arrive early for an evening presentation. Floor materials and other surfaces with which the public comes in contact should be pleasant yet durable. Ease of maintenance should be considered in the choice of these materials. Lobby



lighting should be dramatic, while at the same time providing a warm and attractive ambiance, avoiding purely utilitarian lighting that results in unflattering colors and shadows.

There are often challenging acoustical, audio, and video issues involved with the planning and design of a lobby. Most lobbies have considerably "livelier" acoustics than other aspects of a performance facility, in order to promote the excitement of the crowd, both before a performance and at intermission. At the same time, the lobby cannot be so reverberant that simple conversation becomes difficult. In addition, most lobbies include a sound system for music and announcements, and video monitors that allow latecomers to view the performance while waiting to be seated at a scene break or some other appropriate pause. This audio and video equipment must be carefully integrated into the design of the lobby so as not to interfere with the architectural design intent.

Aside from comfortably housing the audience for performances and special events, lobbies have another impor-

tant function: to announce the presence of the theatre to the public. Many lobbies have "transparent" (i.e., glass) walls to the outside and are designed and lighted in such a way as to entice passers-by to take part in the theatrical experience. A successful lobby design can promote the theatre's activities—even on non-event days—and help increase ticket sales.

In summary, the lobby provides a physical and psychological transition from an everyday reality to a different and more exciting world of theatre, dance and music. A well-designed lobby can help make this transition memorable and exciting. The design of an effective lobby is based on an appropriate allowance of square footage relative to the seat count of the auditorium, the provision of appropriate support spaces, the efficient layout of the lobby and circulation spaces, the choice of materials, and the perceived ambiance of the public spaces. Magic is the final ingredient.

Robert Long, ASTC  
Robert Shook, ASTC

## UNDER FLOOR AIR SUPPLY IN THEATRES AND CONCERT HALLS

HVAC design for performing arts spaces is re-visiting a trend from an earlier era, but with a new, refined twist. Everyone recalls seeing mushroom on the auditorium floor for return air in Vaudeville halls, but there have been many advances since then.

Modern mechanical engineering sets high standards for comfort, quiet and energy efficiency. And modern Performance Space Planning sets high standards for comfort and ease of operation. To that end, the more elegant modern solution is an integration of the Supply Air terminal device with or beneath the fixed audience seating unit.

This approach affords the opportunity for a high degree of comfort, efficiently derived, and with exceptional continuity from chair to chair - spectator to spectator. Supply air provided from the same point as return air in yester-

year requires a rather small  $\Delta T$  (change in temperature) between the terminal device and the zone to be conditioned - on the order of  $5^\circ$ , at a relatively low volume of 25-30 cfm with a velocity of around 70 fpm.

Conventional supply-high / return-low systems provide closer to a  $15\text{-}20^\circ \Delta T$  between the terminal and zone to be conditioned, with velocities on the order of 400 fpm at the device. Under floor supply air provides lower velocities and lower  $\Delta T$  (change in temperature) to condition the space more efficiently, and therefore, the operating cost will be far less for the operator over the life of the building.

The one-time capital cost of

constructing an under-floor supply air system can be greater than conventional supply-high / return-low system since often one must excavate for a supply air plenum below the main level seating to handle the greater air volume, at lower velocity. The return on investment is better, however.

Of particular interest to design and construction professionals is the coordination of the floor slab penetrations for the supply air with the terminal device. Because precision placement is critical

in coordinating structure and seating, and because construction means and methods vary from project to project, we tend to see a few different approaches to aligning the slab penetrations and the supply air pedestals. The

more precise, but often the more costly method is to core-drill the holes in pre-determined structure-free zones in the slab at a point relatively late in the construction phase.

We also often see a method that blocks out the slab penetration in the concrete pour, and where this may be more economical, there is a greater risk of mis-matching the penetrations and the chair layout. This risk is due to the concrete formwork being one of the first steps, and the chair installation being one of the last steps in the construction process.

William B. Allison III, ASTC



Photo courtesy of Theatre Solutions Inc

## ASTC MEMBER NEWS

Todd Hensley, ASTC, has been named a partner at Schuler & Shook, Inc. Todd has been a key theatre designer in the Chicago office of Schuler & Shook since 1988, and he has been a Principal with the firm since 1999.

Schuler & Shook is pleased to announce that it has recently hired Joseph Kovalick as a theatre consultant. Jody was a member of the first group of interns to participate in ASTC activities, at the 1999 ASTC Forum in San Francisco.

The Connecticut office of Theatre Projects Consultants has relocated to expanded facilities at:

25 Elizabeth Street  
South Norwalk CT 06854-3025  
phone 203-299-0830  
fax 203-299-0835  
web www.tpcworld.com

The Toronto office of Theatre Projects Consultants has relocated to:

29A Leslie Street  
Toronto Ontario M4M 3C3  
Canada  
phone 416-406-5140  
fax 416-465-9037

## ASTC OUTREACH FUND

The ASTC Outreach Fund supports the Society's continuing goals of education and outreach to theatre users, administrators, designers, and builders. The fund has been created in response to contribution offers honoring deceased members and to further the outreach goals of the Society.

Activities supported by the Fund include:

- \* The ASTC Forum Intern Program
- \* ASTC Design Charrettes benefiting allied organizations
- \* Educational presentations to theatre professional groups

The fund welcomes donations to further these goals. Donations are accepted at:

ASTC Outreach Fund  
12226 Mentz Hill Rd  
St. Louis, MO 63128

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## Theatre projects in progress

*The following theatre and assembly projects are in various stages of design and construction in ASTC members' offices:*

### AUERBACH + ASSOCIATES

Mesa Arts and Entertainment Center, Mesa, AZ  
National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Cincinnati, OH  
Judy and Authur Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall, New York, NY

### CDAI

The Kimball Theatre, Colonial Williamsburg, VA  
Nova-Southeastern University Theatre, Fort Lauderdale, FL  
The Conradi Theatre, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL

### ROBERT DAVIS, INC.

Indiana University Dept. of Theatre and Drama, Bloomington, IN  
Pell Chafee Performance Center, Trinity Repertory Company, Providence, RI

Playwrights Horizons, New York, NY

### FISHER/DACHS ASSOCIATES INC.

Oklahoma City Civic Center Music Hall, Oklahoma City, OK  
Bushnell Theatre, Hartford, CT  
Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines' Brilliance of the Seas

### GEORGE C. IZENOUR ASSOCIATES

Blair School of Music, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN  
Country Music Hall of Fame, Nashville, TN  
Theater/Recital Hall, American University, Washington, DC

### J&M ASSOCIATES

Vinalheaven School, Vinalheaven, ME  
Windham High School, Windham, ME  
Exeter High School, Exeter, NH

### JERIT/BOYS, INC.

University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS  
Washington Pavilion for the Arts and Sciences, Sioux Falls, SD  
Augustana College, Sioux Falls, SD

### JONES & PHILLIPS ASSOCIATES, INC.

Georgia World Congress Center, Phase 4 Expansion, Atlanta, GA  
New Fine Arts Wing, Butler University, Indianapolis, IN  
New Performing Arts Center, Lively Arts Center, Daytona Beach, FL

### LANDRY & BOGAN

Cal State Fullerton Performing Arts Center, Fullerton, CA  
University of Arizona, Ina Gittings expansion, Tucson, AZ  
South Mountain Community College PAC, Phoenix, AZ

### ROBERT LORELLI ASSOCIATES, INC.

Ruth Eckerd Hall, Clearwater, FL  
Suffolk Cultural Arts Center, Suffolk, VA  
Thrasher-Horn Center for the Arts, Orange Park, FL

### LUSTIG & ASSOCIATES, INC.

A.G. Edwards & Sons, Inc. Learning Center, St. Louis, MO  
Roland Fine Arts Center, Hannibal laGrange College, Hannibal, MO  
Hayworth Fine Arts Center, High Point University, High Point, NC

### PELTON MARSH KINSELLA

Charles W. Eisemann Center for Performing Arts and Corporate Presentation, Richardson, TX  
Caughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center, Lafayette, LA  
Opryland Hotel and Resort, Orlando, FL

### SCHULER & SHOOK, INC.

Pantages Theatre, Minneapolis, MN  
Marion Oliver McCaw Hall, Seattle Center, Seattle, WA  
Millenium Park Music Pavilion, Chicago, IL

### THEATER DESIGN INC.

Constans Theater Addition, University of Florida at Gainesville, Gainesville, FL  
Teatro do Fortealeza, Estado do Ceara, Brasil  
Seven Bridges Middle School, Chappaqua, NY

### THEATRE PROJECTS CONSULTANTS, INC.

Kodak Theatre, Hollywood & Highland Project, Hollywood, CA  
Benjamin & Marian Schuster Performing Arts Center, Dayton, OH  
Kimmel Regional Performing Arts Center, Philadelphia, PA

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## ASTC NEWS

- ASTC Forum 2001 will be held September 2001 in Salt Lake City, UT. Our main topic will be Church Design and Theatre Consulting.
- The International Building Code Conference was held in July of this year. ASTC member Bill Connor represented our interests at that meeting.
- Information regarding the ASTC Internship Program is available through the ASTC office.

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semi-annually by the

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*Robert Shook, Editor*

12226 Mentz Hill Road  
St. Louis, Missouri 63128  
Ph: 314 843-9218 fax: 314 843-4955