

BEFORE THE CURTAIN

**Guiding Principles
for Developing a
Successful Theater**

Designing for Success

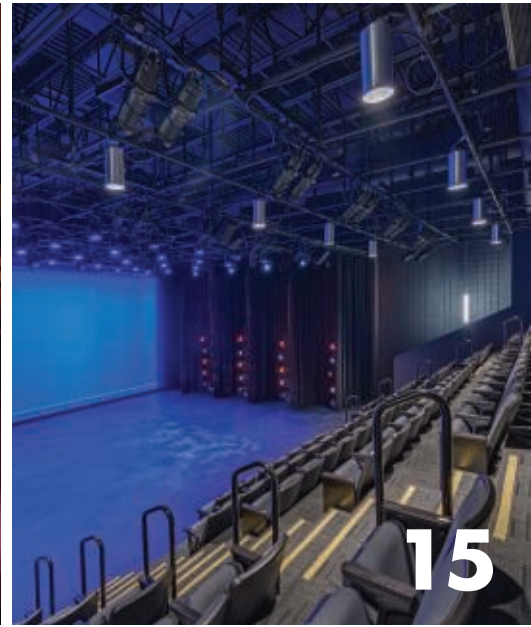
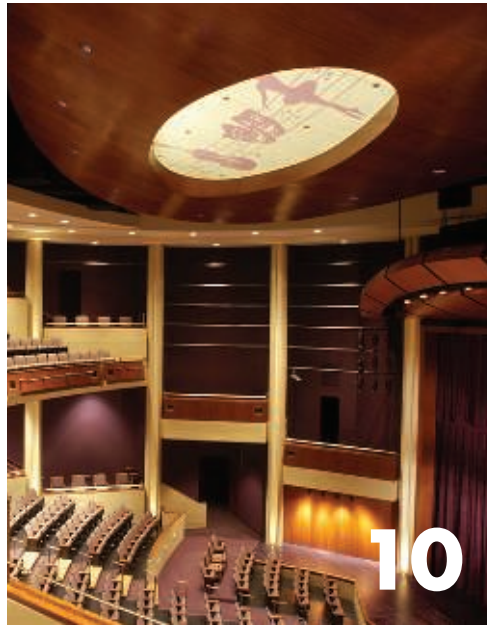
Restoring the Alley

Building Community



**BEFORE THE
CURTAIN**

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DESIGNING FOR SUCCESS

By: Pete Ed Garrett

As the lights dim and audience chatter dies down,

performers back stage take a collective deep breath and prepare for opening night. The first word spoken on stage is the culmination of months of hard work and preparation as patrons settle into their plush seats and prepare to enjoy the show. But, what determines whether this show is unforgettable or blasé is in the details. Before this crowning opening-night moment, the design team had hundreds of conversations about everything from the color of the carpet to the size of the stage. Each design decision made, large or small, heavily impacts both actors and audience members.

A truly great theater space encourages a **strong actor-audience relationship**. It's no coincidence that patrons are called audience members. By definition a member belongs to a group. In theater, audience members and actors are not

separate entities, but coexist, working together as a group to create a meaningful performance. It is our job as architects to nurture and foster this relationship. The arts exist to move people. Academy-Award-winning movies, Tony-Award-winning plays and Grammy-Award-winning songs all have one thing in common - they elicit a strong, emotional response from viewers. The details come together to create a moment of euphoria or agony, the moment Elphaba hits the high note in *Wicked*, Cosette's mother holds her for the last time in *Les Misérables* or the Phantom of the Opera falls in love. The built theater environment has the power to not just support, but encourage these moments, these experiences that elevate performances beyond simply entertaining audience members to inspiring them.

A lot occurs behind the scenes to create a theater that successfully fosters an emotional connection between actor and audience. In the design phase it's necessary to



utilize an inside-out approach and simultaneously develop all operational, relational and aesthetic ideas to create an effective theater space. If the interior of a theater looks beautiful but half of the seats have viewing obstructions or terrible sight lines, that beauty is wasted. Similarly, if the space is extremely efficient and functional but uncomfortable for audience members, that functionality is wasted. It's through the marriage of form and function that elite theater spaces

come to life. Additional considerations include material types in the room, acoustical requirements and colors. The goal is to develop an audience chamber that reinforces and directs focus onto the performance area, enhances the connection between performer and audience and maximizes the viewing and hearing experience.



“A truly great theater space encourages a strong actor - audience relationship.”

PETE ED GARRETT
PARTNER, STUDIO RED



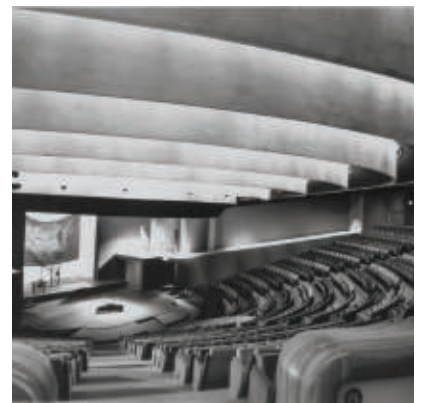
RESTORING THE ALLEY

When the Alley Theatre was completed in 1968, Clive Barnes of the New York Times called it “one of the most attractive and striking new theaters in the world.” Newsweek wrote, “the most striking theatre in the U.S. ... another step along the road toward ending Broadway’s domination of the American theatre.” Designed by renowned architect Ulrich Franzen, the building has received numerous accolades over the years, placing it firmly among the most iconic theaters nationwide. In 1994, the Brutalist-style structure received the Twenty-Five Year Award from the American Institute of Architects Houston, recognizing its distinguished architecture of lasting quality. As one of the three oldest resident theaters in the United States, the Alley currently produces over 500 performances yearly, more than all other organizations in the Houston Theater District combined.



In 1982, Pete Ed Garrett began working with the Alley on various projects and in 2013 Studio RED was selected to design a high-profile, \$46.5-million makeover for the prominent theater. The renovations doubled the size of the Patricia

Peckinpugh Hubbard Stage, removed viewing obstructions and added a large four-story fly loft and associated grid. Additional renovations include adding a fully trapped area below the stage floor, rigging, lighting, sound system,



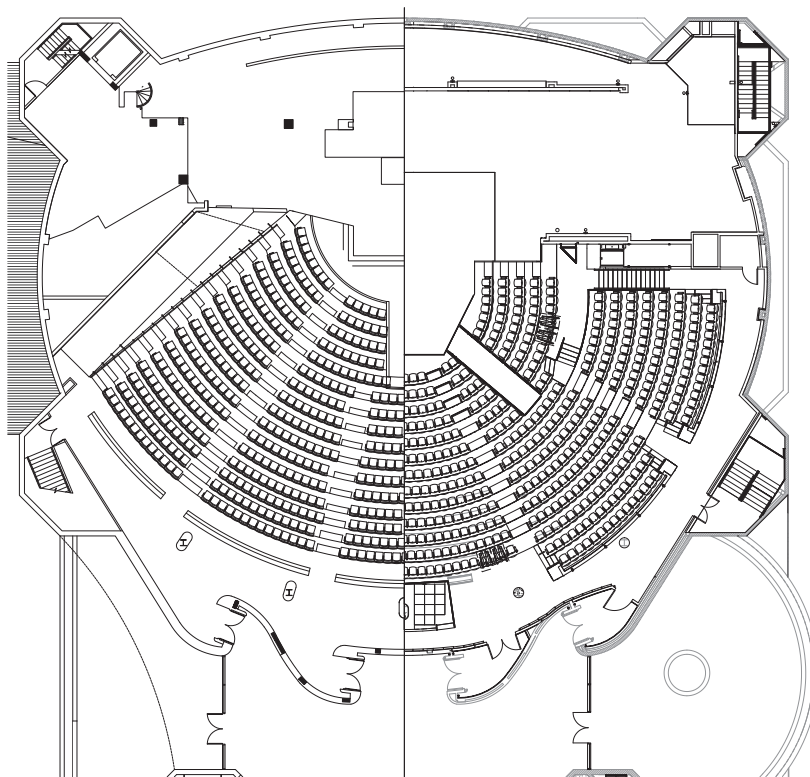
and seating improvements. The acoustics in the audience chamber were enhanced, allowing natural voice, unassisted by microphones, to carry through the house, while negating exterior downtown traffic and light-rail noise. Handicap patrons’ access and experience was improved with handicap lifts in the house for varied seating options and through the installation of an induction loop for patrons with hearing aids. Infrastructure upgrades include a new multi-zoned air conditioning system and modernized electrical and plumbing systems, resulting in a more energy-efficient building. Additionally, the lobby was renovated and the building’s concrete exterior was cleaned, restoring it to its 1968 prestige.

The shape of the theater house was reworked to create a tighter audience radius and deeper thrust stage, providing the audience with a more intimate experience. The stage

is modeled after the celebrated Vivian Beaumont Theater at Lincoln Center. The Hubbard Stage is now one of the best-equipped nonprofit theater facilities in the country, featuring cutting-edge lighting, scenic and sound technology. The redesigned stage provides a more personalized theatrical experience, with 61 percent of the seats in the first eleven rows. The new seating arrangement also offers greater comfort and improved access for patrons. For the actors, the renovation includes new dressing rooms, rehearsal and warm-up rooms, and a spacious green room. Additionally, the renovated theater allows productions to load and unload more efficiently, so the Alley can extend the runs of popular shows.

The renovation has transformed the patron experience: public spaces have been reconfigured to offer additional

handicapped access, expanded restroom facilities and other amenities, including a new bar with a dramatic skyline view, a donor lounge, catering spaces and multi-purpose event rooms. The existing, iconic sweeping staircase was an essential part of the original Alley architecture, but Studio RED wanted to open up the lobby, creating more intrigue between levels. This was accomplished by manipulating the geometry with an extended sweeping staircase in the main lobby from the third floor to the upper third floor. Patterned glazing was also added on the fourth floor meeting rooms to generate drama for patrons, providing glimpses of silhouettes in the meeting rooms, while maintaining the space's privacy. Through careful attention to detail the design team was able to both respect and honor the past, while propelling the Alley into the future of theater.



OLD SEATING CONFIGURATION

NEW SEATING CONFIGURATION



THE CRITICS HAVE SPOKEN

"The result is a building that builds upon the past and honors the evolving needs of the company."

**Jesse Hager, AIA
Texas Architect Magazine**

"The Alley could serve as the linchpin in the revitalization of downtown's Theater District."

**Everett Evans
Houston Chronicle**

"Talk about an extreme makeover."

**Clifford Pugh
CultureMap**



MEET THE ARCHITECT PETE ED GARRETT, AIA

Why did you become an architect?

I have always been very creative and artistic. Architecture is exciting because not only do you create spaces, you also leverage psychology to influence the atmosphere and mood of a place.

Why do you design theaters specifically?

I'm passionate about the arts and passionate about creating facilities that encourage actor-audience interaction. I love going to the theater and it's a privilege to work with clients to create unique, memorable spaces. A building is never just about four walls, it's about what happens inside those walls and about fostering an engaging experience.

What's your favorite theater project you've worked on?

It's hard to pick a favorite because I truly enjoy each project I work on, but I particularly enjoyed working on the Midtown Arts & Theater Center Houston. The client wanted a space that brought together a variety of groups and engaged the public in ways that are non-traditional, for a theater. We worked with our partner Lake|Flato to develop a great space.

What tips would you give owners looking to build a new theater?

Know what you're hoping to achieve. Theaters can be intimate, epic, grand, or cozy. The type of space needed is dictated by the atmosphere the owner wants to create.

Where do you begin when designing a theater space?

I spend a lot of time with the client, listen to their concerns, ideas and dreams. Then I draw upon my years of experience to identify feasible parameters and merge those parameters with what the client is looking to create. But, it all comes down to actor-audience interaction, a great space fosters that.

What tips would you give owners looking to renovate a theater?

Take the time to preserve original elements in the space. A good renovation is a thoughtful renovation that both plans for the future and gives a nod to the past.

What's your favorite play and why?

I'd have to go with *The Lion King*. Who can resist the *Circle of Life*?



30+
Years of
Experience



50+
Theaters
Designed



25+
Design
Awards Won



MAKING THE GRADE

CREATING TOP NOTCH HIGHER EDUCATION THEATERS

Designing successful higher education theaters requires an understanding of both the performing arts world and a typical college atmosphere. Below are several sample projects that illustrate Studio RED's knowledge of both. Effective higher education theaters ensure teachers can instruct and prepare the next generation of performers.



Lee College Performing Arts Center

LEE COLLEGE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

Lee College selected Studio RED to design a new educational building—a performing arts center. In addition to the 800-seat proscenium theater, black box theater, recording studio and support spaces, the building holds 28 classrooms. The flexible space hosts a variety of events ranging from photography displays to the Baytown Symphony Orchestra and All-Region Jazz Concerts.



Texas Southmost College Music Education Building

TEXAS SOUTHMOST COLLEGE MUSIC EDUCATION BUILDING

Studio RED was selected to design a new 54,000-square-foot music education facility, including an 800-seat proscenium theater, three rehearsal halls, teaching studios and dressing rooms. The building also includes instructional spaces for eight different music groups, including string orchestra, jazz and concert bands, wind and percussion ensembles and brass choir as well as the opera program. Organizing multiple entrances for patrons, students and back-of-house service functions led to a nautilus plan configuration.

HOUSTON BAPTIST UNIVERSITY CULTURAL ARTS CENTER

Studio RED served as the architect for several Houston Baptist University projects including the 94,000-square-foot, \$18.4-million-dollar Cultural Arts Center that consists of a 1,200-seat theater, 365-seat recital hall/chapel, 11,000-square-foot museum and grand lobby able to accommodate up to 500 people for formal events and sit-down dinners. The gallery features three separate museums: the Dunham Bible Museum, Museum of American Architecture and Decorative Arts and Museum of Southern History.



Houston Baptist University Cultural Arts Center

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS MUSIC EDUCATION BUILDING

Studio RED was selected to design the University of St. Thomas' new 100,000-square-foot proscenium theater and multi-purpose facility. The building includes a 900-seat theater, a 250-seat black box, two rehearsal halls, a 900-seat conference center, a 600-seat banquet room, faculty offices and teaching classrooms. The four-story, 94,000-square-foot performing arts center is located on the northwest corner of the University of St. Thomas' campus, adjacent to the Menil Collection. Interior and exterior spaces are incorporated into the design to supplement additional campus functions.



University of St. Thomas Music Education Building

DEL MAR COLLEGE RICHARDSON AUDITORIUM

Studio RED served as design and theater architect for the addition and renovation of the existing Richardson Auditorium. Studio RED designed a new lobby, ticket booth, concessions, greenroom, dressing rooms, prop storage and restrooms. The existing 1,800-seat theater was renovated to incorporate improved sight lines, ADA seating and an ADA accessible light and sound control booth. New architectural lighting was added in the theater to create pre-curtain excitement.



Del Mar College Richardson Auditorium



MEET THE ARCHITECTS



GWYNDOLYN MOWBRAY
AIA, LEED AP BD+C

What excites you most about spearheading Studio RED's Denver office?

I believe in this firm and the high-quality architecture and service we provide, so it excites me to share our expertise with a new market and create great theater spaces all over the country.

You serve as Studio RED's BIM Manager, what is BIM?

Building Information Modeling is a 3D model-based process that allows design teams to more efficiently plan spaces. My responsibilities include setting up new projects, mentoring peers, and troubleshooting model issues. I enjoy expanding my BIM knowledge and sharing that knowledge with my colleagues so it can be leveraged on a variety of projects.

How do you create a superior theater-going experience for patrons?

It starts with the details. Everything from the color and type of fabric chosen to wayfinding/signage and viewing angles must be taken into consideration. Patrons must be captivated by the space long before the first curtain opens.

What is one of the biggest challenges clients face when designing a new theater?

I think one of the biggest challenges clients face is fundraising. Most of our theater clients are nonprofit organizations that rely on the goodwill of others to keep serving the community. Often times raising the capital to begin the design process seems insurmountable. But, that's where Studio RED comes in. We have extensive experience designing fundraising packages and love partnering with our clients to share their project with the community.



JARED WOOD, AIA

What is your favorite part about being an architect?

I love that being an architect means merging the creative with the technical. I enjoy finding the balance in both and designing custom, creative spaces.

What's the most challenging theater project you've worked on?

Each project has its own unique set of challenges but I'd have to say The Alley in downtown Houston. We worked on a tight site and faced the challenge of preserving some of the beautiful original architecture and design elements. But, I think we rose to the challenge and the project turned out well.

What do you enjoy most about working at Studio RED?

Studio RED really is a special architecture firm. A lot of architecture firms make projects about them - their design goals, vision etc. But, at Studio RED we prioritize partnering with our clients to develop superior design solutions together. There's no ego involved, and I love that.

Have you ever been in a theater production?

Yes, I was Ronnie in *Greater Tuna* in high school, but I only said a few words and handed a note to one of the main characters. My passion has always been on the technical side of things, even then.



SHEILA ROWLEY RA, LEED AP BD+C

What does creating quality architecture mean to you?

The creation of quality architecture means designing spaces that are beautiful and functional, tailor-made for each client. It means listening to all stakeholders and reaching a successful design solution through a collaborative process.

How long have you been in the architecture field and what do you enjoy most about it?

I have over 30 years of experience in design and architecture and I love seeing our clients' visions evolve into ideas that guide design and result in successful built projects.

What are some practical ways you help Studio RED maintain their high standard of project delivery?

I am usually involved in the early concept stages to help identify technical or Code issues that can either challenge or inform our designs. I stay involved with teams through design development, documentation and construction to help ensure the design we provided is delivered.

You've worked on several sustainable projects, which one has been your favorite so far?

I enjoy each project I work on, but the City of Houston Permitting Center was especially rewarding. The adaptive reuse of a 1920s rice warehouse in downtown Houston and integration of sustainable design elements to achieve LEED Gold® certification were challenging and fun.

A GUIDE TO COST ESTIMATING



Identify Optimal Project Budget

Before entertaining design concepts and site plans for a new theater, it's essential to identify an optimal project budget for both current and future needs. You measure the funding capability of a capital campaign by the size of your building program.

Identify Financial Capacity & Define Goals

Identifying financial capacity for a building program and defining the goals and needs of a theater is a process that Studio RED facilitates through a visionary session called REDefine. Once funding capacity and performance requirements are determined, Studio RED, using a variety of planning multipliers, defines an early concept building program that aligns with funding capacity. Because this happens early in the programming, design and construction process, potential issues are minimized and all team members understand short- and long-term project goals.

Develop & Leverage Costing/Budget Matrix

On many projects, Studio RED works with a cost estimator or a Construction Manager at Risk (CMAR) to identify an accurate project cost early in the process. Studio RED's experience with cost modeling theaters gives us the ability to budget both what is on the drawings and what's not on the drawings, but necessary for construction. We develop

and hold the costing/budget matrix that all team members use at the start of the project to identify the budget. The team leverages the initial matrix to refine cost estimates and develops it further as cost control is managed and maintained, starting at 25% Design Development Phase. One of the main goals of REDefine work sessions is to control costs.

Remain Hands On Throughout Project To Maintain Budget

For the duration of the project, the team designs within that budget, maintaining costs and finding creative design solutions. Potential changes or requests are easily reviewed when put in front of the group to be evaluated, discussed and decided on in person, not through email or phone messages. This allows team members to work together to find economical solutions.

Eliminate Surprises

Through the REDefine process, Studio RED eliminates surprises and empowers team members to focus on design, documentation and construction of the project. Using this method, the owner knows the project estimates early and the client can move forward assured the design matches the approved quality and budget.



TIPS FOR LEADING A CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

Educate theater staff about capital campaigns

Identify new major donors and improve relationships with long-term supporters

Be transparent and share projected growth and needs for space, parking, etc.

Develop capital campaign marketing materials

Schedule regular meetings to keep current and potential donors informed



BUILDING COMMUNITY

DESIGNING ENGAGING LOCAL THEATERS

While theaters have specific programmatic requirements, the real challenge lies in creating a dynamic space that engages the community and makes an impact beyond the bounds of the auditorium. Studio RED recently designed two community-focused theaters in the Greater Houston Area that feature flexible, inviting spaces.

Together with Lake|Flato, Studio RED designed the award-winning Midtown Arts & Theater Center Houston (MATCH) facility. Earning both a Texas Architect 2017 Design Award and an Urban Land Institute 2017 Development of Distinction Award in the Not-for-Profit category, MATCH is a community theater at its finest.

The 59,000-square-foot community arts complex provides a centralized hub for a variety of arts organizations. The building includes four theater spaces, two rehearsal spaces/classrooms, gallery spaces, support spaces and offices. The north building's four performing spaces range from 100 seats to 329 seats, and can serve as traditional theaters, dance or visual arts areas. A cafe with floor-to-ceiling glass overlooks a small plaza, linking interior and exterior spaces.

MATCH's landmark feature is an outdoor breezeway linking the north and south buildings and providing a practical space for theatergoers to engage with the Midtown community. While an outdoor lobby initially sounded like a risky move in the tropical Houston climate, Studio RED and Lake|Flato worked diligently to create airflow in the space.

To make MATCH a reality financially, four local arts groups pooled their resources to secure a central piece of land. MATCH is sited halfway between downtown Houston and

the renowned Texas Medical Center and between the Theater District and Museum District. This centralized location was a catalyst for the community-focused design of the facility, including the outdoor breezeway. MATCH's new building serves as an anchor for Houston's prominent arts scene, while providing a casual, engaging space for theatergoers.

In addition to MATCH, Studio RED was selected to renovate Main Street Theater, a new landmark in the Houston arts community. The renovated 5,700-square-foot black box theater includes 99 seats with flexible configurations. The unique theater will have the capability to move from an arena stage to a thrust stage, corner stage, end stage, and grandstand stage with minimal assistance from stage hands. Other improvements include expansion of the current theater volume into a full-height operational theater with lighting grid, additional stage support areas, an elevator and renovated public restrooms.

Main Street Theater supports a variety of productions and provides a community gathering space and rehearsal hall on the second floor. The theater hosts summer, winter and spring break camps, classes for children and young adults ages four to 19, and the MST Ambassador Program. The program provides a chance for young artists to perform and participate in community events.

A community theater is nothing without the support and engagement of the community. Studio RED successfully partnered with both Midtown Arts & Theater Center Houston and Main Street Theater to develop dynamic, engaging spaces that enrich the Houston community.

STUDIO RED ARCHITECTS

Studio RED was created in 2004 by a group of industry veterans who are passionate about architecture that is resourceful, inspired and boundless. Driven by the needs of clients, the Studio RED team works hard to provide exceptional service and deliver successful projects with Principal-level involvement and smart design solutions. The firm specializes in cultural arts, community, worship, commercial, hospitality, renovation, residential, civic, healthcare, planning, and education projects.



Houston, Texas • San Antonio, Texas • Montgomery, Texas • Prairie View, Texas • Galveston, Texas • Jackson, Texas • Kemah, Texas • Kinney, Texas • Orange, Texas • Brownsville, Texas • Fort Worth, Texas • Charlotte, North Carolina • Orlando, Florida • Kennedy Space Center, Florida • Chicago, Illinois • Los Angeles, California • Washington, D.C. • Sandy, Utah • San Diego, California • Santa Fe, New Mexico • St. Louis, Missouri • Honolulu, Hawaii • Quang Tri, Vietnam • Phuket, Thailand • Beihai, China