

A theatre consultant, two architects and a cost consultant comment on the rise of 'superstar' architects who often do not have any real interest in the detail of the performance space and are only interested in the awards and publicity that their building may pick up.

ask us whether we've designed any theatres before! They also ask fatuous questions like *How will you communicate with the client?* I usually write in *We will talk to them a lot.* So this is a system which I think mitigates against the architect who understands the theatre, who makes good, simple buildings, the architect who wants to listen and learn rather than dictate.

One of the results in the theatre world, unfortunately, of the rise of what I call the external architect (the architect who makes a strong image of the building but loses interest when it comes to the auditorium) is that auditoria – and I'm going to be a bit controversial here – are increasingly being designed (and I think this is particularly the case in North America) by theatre consultants and acousticians, not by architects. The result, I have to say, is often visually inept. They may work acoustically. They may work technically. But they look awful. I think and believe that the architect is the person with the three-dimensional skills who should listen very carefully to these specialists, and then shape their needs into a coherent whole which is greater than the sum of the parts.

I am a firm believer that the architect must be a team player but, sadly, some aren't. So to design a good theatre, an architect must have enough knowledge, albeit perhaps superficial, about the various different technical disciplines – acoustics, lighting, ventilation and so on – to find the right balance between the often conflicting requirements of the different specialists whom he is trying to mediate between. But don't misunderstand me; I'm not saying that all theatres should be designed by established theatre specialists. There are plenty of excellent theatres by architects who had never designed one before: examples include Bill Howell's Young Vic, which I mentioned earlier, and Levitt Bernstein's Royal Exchange in Manchester, and indeed most of the examples which we saw in the previous session this afternoon. So what is important is the architect's willingness to listen and learn. I think a theatre is like a musical instrument; its success should be judged on its ability to allow the artist to excel, not in its own right as a piece of architecture.

So I think my final advice to theatre users who want a good building is: Don't be bemused by the bureaucrats. You know what you want; you must remain in control and you must make sure you get it. Ω

Fourth speaker: Stewart Donnell

First of all, I want to say that what I'm going to say is in no way meant to denigrate the ordinary, competent, hard-working architect that one meets in every city in the world. But I'm going to take the position pro the superstar design architects.

Point one: I feel that, after all, it's the client's prerogative to hire whom he or she or the community wishes for any project. It's also mandatory, to prevent problems down the line, to have a properly detailed and adequate budget up front, especially at the program stage, for this building type. Second, some of the advantages that a client gets through the hiring of a superstar architect are that he or she gets a honed and informed intellect, a wide repertoire of design option opportunities or possibilities, a striking and innovative design, leading to the 'postcard' or 'wow' effect. We've all seen – we're probably tired of seeing – the Sydney Opera House, which has appeared in almost every presentation. Third, make no mistake, and I want to stress this, that the superstar architect can really greatly enhance a client's fund-raising ability for a project. I have personally seen projects change their cladding from brick to stone with a \$3 million premium at a cocktail party. So make no mistake; the attraction of a superstar, even with their faults, can really enhance funding. I believe the design of a theater done by a superstar can attract widespread community interest early on in the project, and that's often entirely sustainable through the life of the project. And importantly, since the superstar normally does the design and a local architect does the hard work of drawings, the local associate architect and the other professionals can gain valuable experience and excitement in their tasks.

From our perspective, and we are working with five superstars right now in our practice, the influence on design forms, and certainly materials, lie in six areas. The plan form; one can get unusual forms when working with architects like Peter Eisenmann, but with someone like Richard Pilbrow involved as theater consultant, he and his team can successfully control some of the whims, imagination and genius of this architectural type. Exterior skin and massing is greatly affected by the superstar, as witnessed on the Walt Disney Hall in Los Angeles; he can be a whiz on interior public spaces, but can also increase areas and volumes beyond program of all these buildings, and we've had many examples of those. The