

CHICAGO ARCHITECT

REGENERATIVE
DESIGN // 28

GARDEN MASTER

BY MED UHLIR, FAIA // 34

THE SLINGS AND ARROWS OF OUTRAGEOUS INNOVATION

CHICAGO'S NEW SHAKESPEARE THEATER BY ADRIAN SMITH + GORDON GILL ARCHITECTURE READIES TO OPEN



From Shakespeare in the Park in New York City to the Colorado Shakespeare Festival in Boulder, Colorado, it seems almost customary for cities to devote time and space to present the romance, violence and Elizabethan puns that enchant us on stage. In Chicago, the longstanding Shakespeare Theater at Navy Pier has provided fresh takes and classical interpretations of Shakespearean works at their dedicated theater for 30 years. Only recently in conjunction with Navy Pier’s centennial reinvention was the iconic white tent theater space (called The Yard) to be renovated. Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture was selected to complete the overhaul, alongside the UK-based acoustic and theater consulting group CharcoalBlue, slated to be completed in June with their first show in September.

This massive project involved creating a new connecting corridor that links two existing theater spaces and box office with the redesigned tent interior. It also introduces a

wholly new concept to Chicago’s theater scene: the use of movable seating towers. Nine individual towers with three levels of seating can be reconfigured into 11 differ

ent permutations allowing for an adaptable seating arrangement.

“It’s unlike anything you’ve seen in Chicago ... it changes the way you experience theater and the

possibilities for performances,” said Ben Johnson, AIA, director at AS+GG. He is also the project manager of the project alongside lead architect Chad Smith. Gordon

Gill, FAIA, is the design partner for the Yard with Management Partner Robert Forest, FAIA.

Another dynamic and innovative component of the new theater presents as the connection to the existing theater complex by creating a new, two-story corridor. From the exterior, a south-facing, curved glass curtain provides visual continuity between the original structure's glass façade. "What we were looking at is creating a major feature with a glass curtain that looks toward the interrupted views of the lakeshore," Gill said. Facing south, one sees the shore-side skyline and, at the far end, the Adler Planetarium dome. "You couldn't have planned [those] views," he exclaimed. "But with those views, what we're dealing with is a huge heat gain from the south-facing glass."

After exploring multiple possibilities to reduce that heat intake including motorized shading, Gill met with the CEO of SageGlass, a major producer of electrochromic glass that uses electrical pulses and sensors to darken the tint on windows automatically, utilizing minimalistic sensors placed atop the glass. As the sun peaks over Lake Michigan and Navy Pier, the windows protect the corridor from high heat. At night, as Gill described, "the corridor becomes a theatrical event itself" with a clear glass façade illuminating a procession of guests entering the theater.

This procession embodies the theatrics of the architecture itself: this new corridor features a ground-level promenade that connects to the box office, with a hanging second-floor canopy walkway that takes the audience to the existing lounge on the east, or to the tower seating within the theater — all on view to the public

TEAM

Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture: Gordon Gill, Design Partner; Adrian Smith, Design Partner; Robert Forest, Management Partner; Ben Johnson, Project Manager; Chad Smith, Senior Architect; and Rebecca Cryder, Interiors; Charcoal Blue LLP, Theater Design, Acoustics; Thornton Tomasetti, Structural Engineering; ESD, MEP/FP; Gwen Grossman Lighting Design; V3 Companies, Civil Engineering; Jensen Hughes, Inc., Fire & Life Safety; Bulley & Andrews, General Contractor; Show Canada, Seating Tower Design Build Contractor; ICL Architects, Theatre Systems

KEY MANUFACTURERS

SageGlass, Curtainwall Systems



outside of the glass façade during the evening shows.

"The space has an elegant yet light industrial feel," Gill said, "designed to be dynamic, the curvilinear space slowly unfolds along the procession to the theater."

The new space features a wealth of technological innovations that address the changing needs of a 21st-century theater. Flexible mechanical systems (ESD) provide um-

bilical connections for HVAC, sprinklers and electricity. An intentional redundancy in the infrastructure allows for movement and flexibility in switching between configurations without reconnecting ductwork, sprinkler mains or electrical feeds. All system controls can be run or monitored remotely, or via wireless interface such as an iPad, to maintain the quality of the auditorium environment from multiple locations.

The new Shakespeare Theater will be a force in Chicago's impressive theater scene. Considering Navy Pier's "reinvention" plan that looks to draw locals back to the pier as more than just a tourist attraction, the new Shakespeare Theater promises to draw a contemporary audience to experience Shakespeare in new ways — two long-standing traditions reinvigorated. **CA**