

PROJECT FACT SHEET

The Theatre School at DePaul University

2350 N. Racine Avenue, Chicago

At the southwest corner of Fullerton and Racine, in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood



Renderings by Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects. Please contact Jay Kelly, jkelly@lcwa.com or 312.565.4623 to request hi res images.

DESIGN TEAM:

Architect: Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects/Cannon Design

Theatre Planning Consultant: Schuler Shook - Robert Shook, ASTC; Joshua Grossman, ASTC; Lisa Bernacchi

Acoustics Consultant: Kirkegaard Associates

GRAND OPENING:

Thursday, September 12, 2013 2:30 p.m. private press tours, 4 p.m. official ribbon cutting celebration

Monday, September 16, 2013 3:30 p.m. private press tours, 5 p.m. public open house

OVERVIEW:

The inspired design of the new, \$72 million, 165,000-square-foot Theatre School at DePaul University provides a nationally unique, behind-the-scenes glimpse into one of the top professional theatre conservatory programs in the U.S. A true head-turner, the iconic glass and limestone building also doubles as a striking new western gateway to DePaul's Lincoln Park campus.

For the first time in its nearly 90-year history, The Theatre School at DePaul finally will be operating in a showcase building specifically designed for theatre training, with everyone and everything in one place. Previously, for more than 30 years the Theatre School's "temporary" home had been a well-worn, former elementary school, with additional offices and classrooms in a nearby, reconverted nunnery. Clearly, this was not the ideal environment to support the school's "learn by doing" philosophy, which produces more than two dozen public theatrical productions each season.

Now, The Theatre School at DePaul can boast about its new, custom-designed building, devised in unusually deep collaboration with school faculty and administrators, and providing new classroom, rehearsal, design and performance spaces that finally align DePaul's facilities with the school's national ranking for theatre training excellence.

Ultimately, the new Theatre School at DePaul will widen artistic horizons, add vitality to the community, and serve as an important new recruitment tool welcoming generations of new students, faculty, artists, performers and audiences for years to come.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

Located at the corner of West Fullerton and North Racine on DePaul's Lincoln Park Campus, the new five-story school houses two new theatre spaces: a 250-seat thrust stage theatre and a 100-seat flexible theatre. By strategically emphasizing openness and transparency, the building's design intentionally puts the excitement of a college-level theatre education on clear view for the neighborhood and theatergoers.

The ground-floor entrance opens into the "living room" of the building – a glass-enclosed lounge, concessions space, box office and lobby – where patrons and students will congregate and be visible from the street. Floor-to-ceiling glass on the ground floor also place many day-to-day activities in the scene shop, metal shop and paint shops on display for the campus and surrounding neighborhood. A sleek, 250-seat thrust stage serves as the anchor destination of the first floor.

The second through fifth floors intentionally mix a variety of departments and spaces devoted to costumes, makeup, props, lighting laboratories, new media workshops and classrooms. In fact, all classrooms have been designed to offer some level of performance and production capabilities. Even better, the building contains an unusual luxury only found at the conservatory level – three separate, dedicated rehearsal spaces, each strategically sized to mirror the dimensions of DePaul's three different stages (the two stages inside the new building, plus the historic, 1,325-seat Merle Reskin Theatre in downtown Chicago, where DePaul students continue to perform.) For students and faculty, that means no more pushing desks and chairs out of the way to clear daytime classrooms for evening rehearsals.

Even 45' up on the fourth floor, the 100-seat, flexible theatre space captures attention from the street below by projecting out above the ground floor entrance. This serves as a bold new sign for the university, particularly when the north façade is illuminated and softly glowing at night, like a beacon for the Theatre School. Much like a scrim, the translucent glass wall of the fourth floor "black box" can also reveal the flexible theatre behind it.

Wide corridors, open lounges and rooftop courtyards encourage interaction between students, faculty and theatergoers. An interior courtyard brings light, views and air to offices and design studios. Rooftop courtyards are surrounded by all elements of the Theatre School— administration, classroom and rehearsal spaces, public lobbies, faculty spaces, and the script library. Designed for LEED certification, strategies to reduce energy consumption include frit glass throughout the building, daylighting for offices, design studios, and classrooms, and a green roof.

Throughout the interior of the new building, behind-the-scenes activity is intentionally made visible to both theatergoers and passersby. Visitors coming to a show on the fourth-floor black box theatre will pass classrooms and rehearsal rooms, minimizing distinctions between performance and work spaces, and making it clear they aren't attending just any theatre, but one of the top university theatre training conservatories in the country.

SCHULER SHOOK THEATRE PLANNERS' CONTRIBUTIONS:

Feasibility studies and architectural programs

DePaul University first tapped Schuler Shook in 2001 to help develop an architectural program – a matrix of all desired spaces, with square footage and general specifications assigned to each – and collaborate on conceptual plans for a proposed shared Theatre and Music School facility on its Lincoln Park campus. While those original plans were put aside, Schuler Shook subsequently participated in three more feasibility studies from 2005 to 2007 for potential new or renovated facilities in the South Loop and on DePaul's Loop campus.

In 2009, Schuler Shook participated in a fifth feasibility study for a Theatre School-only building at Fullerton and Racine. Following this study, DePaul decided to underscore its commitment to arts education by holding a selection process and inviting several well-known theatre architects to submit schemes for an iconic building, using Schuler Shook's architectural program as the key resource document for the design competition. DePaul's final selection was the internationally acclaimed firm Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects, and the project proceeded quickly. Design work began in 2009 and was completed in 2011. Construction began in 2011 and was completed in July, 2013.

Throughout all of these permutations, Schuler Shook remained a common through line and consistent advisor for DePaul's quest for a new Theatre School, providing counsel to John Culbert, longtime Dean of The Theatre School, and since 2004, to DePaul's President, Father Dennis Holtschneider.

According to Dean Culbert, "Schuler Shook was an integral part of the facility design process from beginning to end and they are responsible for the sophisticated and detailed match between the facility and the school. There are three critical aspects leading to the success of their work with The Theatre School. First, they invested in developing a detailed understanding of every aspect of the school from the day to day training in studios, labs and classrooms to the production program of the school with over 30 productions each year, with varying level of production support. Secondly they share a vast wealth of detailed knowledge enabling the evaluation of multiple solutions for each issue in both large conceptual and the most detailed systems issues. Finally, they are superb collaborators throughout the process with all stakeholders from the faculty and staff of the school to the architectural team to the contractors."

Needs assessments

A hallmark of Schuler Shook's approach is the firm's collaborative planning process with all key stakeholders. In this case, Schuler Shook helped manage in-depth needs assessment meetings with DePaul's theatre faculty, staff and students, and the university's top executives. DePaul's faculty, all working professionals, had a particularly deep involvement in the planning process. In the end, according to project leader Robert Shook, "the success of the building is due to the diligence of the faculty and staff throughout the planning process."

Theatre and performance space design

Schuler Shook joined the Pelli Clarke Pelli design team at the start of the full design through completion of construction. Throughout the process, Schuler Shook supported the architect's vision for an open space while ensuring the building provided an optimal environment for theatre instruction and performance.

Specifically, Schuler Shook planned the two performance spaces, notably the seating layouts and sightlines, the stages, and planning, designing, and specifying technical production equipment. For both spaces, Schuler Shook specified all theatre seats, and staggered their size and placement to ensure unobstructed sight lines. The team also specified stage lighting and rigging systems with a high degree of flexibility to allow for current and future technologies.

For the larger, 250-seat "Fullerton stage," Dean Culbert and his faculty agreed the school already had a traditional proscenium stage with its Merle Reskin Theatre. Thus, a thrust configuration was the design of choice for the new building. Schuler Shook led field trips with Culbert and other faculty members to various thrust theatres in Chicago to identify what they liked, and what they didn't, about each.

Anecdotally, Court Theatre in Hyde Park, one of Schuler Shook's earliest design projects, and a theatre where Culbert consistently works as a scenic and lighting designer, served as an inspiration for DePaul's new thrust stage. One of Schuler Shook's important modifications, however, was to design the aisles in such a way that actors have a relatively short, fast entrance when entering the stage from the "back of the house," not the typical longer, time consuming walk through the entire theatre.

Likewise, faculty field trips to black box stages throughout Chicago, including Lookingglass Theatre in Chicago's Water Tower Water Works Building, another Schuler Shook project, played an important part in the final design of DePaul's 100-seat theatre, dubbed "The Healy" in honor of longtime DePaul supporters Sondra and Denis Healy. Decisions like where to situate technical staff and what infrastructure the space would provide, including catwalks, grids, and a variety of flexible seating schemes, were all under Schuler Shook's purview.

Facilitating portability

Pelli Clarke Pelli campaigned for the smaller theatre to be housed on the fourth floor, in part to make it a visually dramatic component of the building's exterior. While there was much discussion regarding practicality, all involved mutually agreed it was in the best interest of the school to provide a training ground where students were obliged to learn a "real world" skill – how to design sets that are portable. As a result, Schuler Shook was challenged with carving out a clear path so that set pieces up to 8'x14'x 8' in size could be transported from the first floor scene shop up to the fourth floor theatre. To that end, Schuler Shook specified an unusually large elevator, 9'x18', for the building and requested huge corridors that are significantly wider and higher than the norm.

THEATRE SCHOOL AT DEPAUL PROJECT TEAM:

Robert Shook, ASTC, Partner

Shook brings to every project a wealth of experience in professional theatre, having been involved in the planning of auditoria, audience areas, backstage operations and technical systems for hundreds of theatres around the world. Chicago projects include Jay Pritzker Pavilion, the Harris Theater for Music and Dance, Ravinia Festival, the Old Town School of Folk Music, Victory Gardens Theater, Lookingglass Theatre, Black Ensemble Theater and the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago. Elsewhere, completed projects include the David H. Koch Theater in New York's Lincoln Center, Marion Oliver McCaw Hall in Seattle, Detroit Symphony Orchestra Hall, and The Skylight in Milwaukee. Notably, Shook is an alumnus of the Goodman School of Drama, which became part of DePaul and was renamed The Theatre School at DePaul in 1978. He was also an adjunct professor in lighting design at the Theater School of DePaul for ten years, from 1978 to 1988. In 1982, Shook met lighting designer Duane Schuler, who was lighting opera in Chicago. In 1986, the two founded Schuler Shook.

Joshua Grossman, ASTC, Principal

Grossman is a creative planner and consultant with strong connections to the professional theatre community. He joined Schuler Shook in 2000, after ten years of working in a variety of capacities, from scenic designer to production manager to technical director in an array of fields, from theatre to special events to television to architectural restoration. Consulting experience locally includes Harris Theater for Music and Dance, the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago, Victory Gardens Theater and Lookingglass Theatre. Elsewhere Grossman is working on the Tateuchi Center in Bellevue, Washington, and the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills.

Lisa Bernacchi, Theatre Consultant

Bernacchi has professional experience in the many aspects of technical theatre and theatre lighting. Her background includes lighting designs for dance concerts, musical theatre, and stage plays. She has worked as an electrician at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater on Navy Pier, Northlight Theater, and for Light Opera Works. Significant Chicago projects include Millennium Park, Victory Gardens Theater, Lookingglass Theatre, Harris Theater for Music and Dance, Black Ensemble Theatre and the Old Town School of Folk Music. Elsewhere, Bernacchi contributed to the design and planning of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts – David H. Koch Theater in New York City, and is working on the Doha Convention Center and Tower in Doha, Qatar.

ABOUT SCHULER SHOOK THEATRE PLANNERS:

Schuler Shook excels at working collaboratively and creatively to achieve excellence in theatre design. The founders' deep background in theatre and theatre design fuels the firm's belief that an open collaborative process is the key to maximizing architectural concepts and assuring that the building supports the work of the artists performing there.

Projects include opera houses, professional theatres, concert halls, dance theatres, ballrooms, worship spaces, and performance venues for universities and high schools; they range from less than 100 seats to over 15,000 seats. Following are areas of specialization:

- Feasibility studies
- Architectural programming
- Theatre planning and building planning
- Theatre seating
- Stage rigging systems
- Stage curtains and tracks
- Stage and orchestra lifts
- Platforming systems
- Stage lighting systems

PARTNERS:

Duane Schuler, Seattle

Robert Shook, Chicago

Michael DiBlasi, Minneapolis

Todd Hensley, Chicago

Jim Baney, Chicago

Jack Hagler, Dallas

CHICAGO OFFICE:

750 North Orleans, Suite 400

Chicago, IL 60654

T. 312 944-8230

F. 312 944-8297

schulershook.com

With additional offices in Minneapolis, Dallas and Melbourne

PRESS CONTACTS/HI-RES IMAGES:

Jay Kelly, Vice President, Arts & Culture, L.C. Williams & Associates

jkelly@lcwa.com, 312.565.4623

or

Lorna Luebbers, Principal, Marketing Director, Schuler Shook (Chicago)

lluebbers@schulershook.com, 312.944.8230 x111

or

Anna Ables, Director of Marketing and Public Relations, the Theatre School at DePaul University

aables@depaul.edu, 773.325.7938

#