

# PROJECT FACT SHEET

## The Mead Center for American Theater

Designed by **Bing Thom Architects** (BTA), Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater features a dramatic and sweeping cantilevered roof that is an architectural landmark for Southwest D.C.'s revitalized waterfront.

The extraordinary center exemplifies Arena Stage's commitment to theater: three theater venues serve as the architectural focal points under one magnificent, unifying roof.

- **The Fichandler Stage** stands as the iconic, original theater space, with its epic, in-the-round auditorium, steeply, raked seating tiers and bold, earthy exterior design. Ideally suited to large-scale classic dramas and musicals, this 683-seat main stage is updated with modern technical equipment and elegant décor in dark maroon colors. Ambient street noise, which used to be a distraction during performances, is eliminated by the center's exterior 35,000 square foot glass curtain wall. The previously existing box seats are sealed off and covered by acoustic reflecting panels to further improve sound within the space. The spirit of the Fichandler is celebrated in this venue where patrons are never more than eight rows away from the stage, allowing the entire audience to be closer to the stage than ever before.
- **The Kreeger Theater**, a 514-seat, fan-shaped space with a modified thrust stage, is updated with current technology and amenities, including furnishings in deep blue colors, while retaining the qualities that make it one of the most artist- and audience-friendly spaces in the country: extraordinary flexibility, excellent acoustics, flawless sightlines and remarkably intimate interaction between actor and audience. This intimacy is further improved through the renovation's design to move the interior staircase—connecting the orchestra and mezzanine levels—to the outside of the theater space, thus bringing the back wall of the house even closer to the audience.
- **The Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle** is a unique, oval-shaped 200-seat theater with flexible seating and the latest technical capabilities. This theater is designed to cradle the risk and innovation required of first, second and third productions of new and developing plays. This sophisticated venue—with its acoustically sound, wooden basket-weaved walls in lush eggplant colors—enables Arena to continue building the canon of American work and cultivating the next generation of American artists.

**“Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater will be a leading center for the production, presentation, development and study of American theater,”** states Artistic Director Molly Smith. “Our center is a home for American Voices in the nation's capital—a showcase of the broad range of work from the country's leading and emerging artists; a birthplace for new American work; and a space to engage audiences in the history, breadth and legacy of the American theater. We are an education and development center in addition to a theater.”

Supporting all three theaters are state-of-the-art technical and costume shops, light and airy rehearsal halls and open education spaces, and for the first time in Arena Stage history, **all artistic and administrative departments are united under one roof.** The Mead Center contains more spaces for artists, staff and members of the board of trustees to promote community, bolster bright ideas and encourage dialogue within the organization.

Central to the extraordinary design is a large, common lobby with an elegant staircase that links all three theater spaces both psychologically and spatially. The new facility features a vastly increased number of restrooms in several locations; a single, efficient Sales Office serving all audiences; readily available concessions and an onsite café; a reading area dedicated to the study of American theater; and easy access to all areas of the building for people with disabilities.

The addition of the onsite classroom space further enhances Arena Stage's ties to the D.C.-area educational community. Placing the classroom next to the rehearsal halls provides young people a unique opportunity to interact with artists at the earliest stages of the creative process.

# Significant Facts about Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater

- **The \$125 million multipurpose campaign** to build Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater was one of the largest in the United States for a regional theater. Philanthropists **Gilbert and Jaylee Mead gave the largest single gift ever to an American regional theater** with their naming gift of \$35 million.
- The Mead Center is **200,000 square feet in size**, making it the largest regional theater in D.C.
- The cantilevered roof, tapered to a compass point and aligned with the Maine Avenue axis, salutes the Washington Monument. This heroic **cantilever is one of the largest in the U.S.**
- As general contractor for the Mead Center, **Clark Construction worked an average 1,500 man hours per day** to stay on track for the fall 2010 opening.
- The foundation of the Mead Center contains **14,000 cubic yards of concrete**, enough to fill four-and-a-half Olympic-sized swimming pools.
- The design team drew inspiration from the jellyfish's transparency when designing the new complex's skin, which is fabricated with glass. There are approximately **370 panes, amounting to 35,000 square feet of glass** that creates the "curtain wall" surrounding the building.
- The parallam wood and insulated glass wall design on the exterior facade is the **first attempt at this type of application in the United States**. Each wood column that supports the building bears 400,000 pounds of load on average.
- The floor of the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle does not touch the adjacent walls. Instead, to ensure acoustic isolation, it sits on 20 separate isolation pads, each the size of a shoebox.
- Located at 1101 Sixth Street SW | Washington, D.C., the facility is only one block from the Waterfront (SEU) green line Metro stop.

**Architect Bing Thom** shares, "The design of the lobby will inspire the audience to be patrons, actors and observers simultaneously, thereby creating the natural drama that occurs during a memorable night at Arena."

The design has won praise from architectural critics and preservationists alike. **Tersh Boarsberg, chair of Washington's Historic Preservation Review Board** noted, "This is a wonderful design that adds so much to our city. It's exemplary...the architecture is unique and different, and imaginative and forceful...and there's special merit because of the importance of this building and this complex to the Southwest and to our city."

**Ben Forgey, former architectural critic for *The Washington Post***, wrote, "People will come to look at, as well as be in, this building. Its transparency will be compelling day or night. Striking structural elements, such as towering mast-like wood columns, fit the setting perfectly. The assortment of buildings will form an enticing little cityscape."

The design was approved in 2003 and again in 2007 by the Commission of Fine Arts, and in 2003 by the Board of Zoning Adjustments.

In addition to creating the Arena Stage design, architect Bing Thom has also provided guidance to the leaders of the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative (AWI) for architectural improvements to other projects within the Southwest D.C. Waterfront. Arena Stage is one of the first projects to open an overall revitalization effort that will make Southwest D.C. an arts and entertainment community and spectacular gateway to our nation's capital.

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