

one of the things that I am particularly excited by is the only true discovery from the reconstruction of The Globe, which is that this is a new form of theatre created from the old – a ‘cauldron’ theatre.

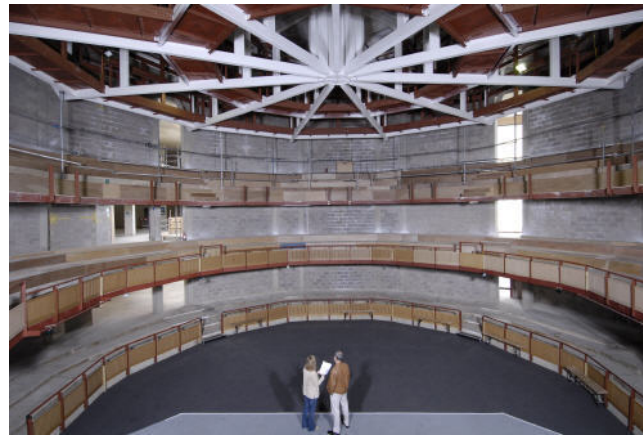
What I call a cauldron theatre is three tiers, very steeply raked and vertically organised in almost a complete circle, creating a sense of a complete enwrapment. This form really does seem to engender a very different audience reaction and one, I think, we can build on. I see a lot of new designs coming forward which are attempting similar approaches. Although not with the same degree of enclosure, the Rose Theatre in Kingston, follows this principle and has been acclaimed by Sir Peter Hall as “the theatre he has been waiting for”.

### The vital nature of seating

One of the many other things to remember is that our responsiveness to a performance is affected by the position of our body and our posture. As designers we consider the sightlines in the stalls and we slope the seat backs so that they are more inclined and you get a more direct sightline to the stage. The backs of circle and gallery seats are much more vertical so that you can look down more easily. In most cinema seats, of course, you lie back sprawling, with the image way up high in the room.

A significant effect that we have noticed is that where the seats have vertical backs, or backs that are nearer to vertical, you have a more active audience. The spine is more upright, the attitude is more active. In the extreme seats in The Globe there are not any backs at all, then you certainly have a very active audience as they shift around on their seats, trying to get comfortable. But it is that activity in the audience which allows them to be part of the production; to actually involve themselves because they are not sitting back, saying, “Okay then, entertain me.”

And for the last 100 years we have tended to do that. We have dimmed the auditorium lights, we have made the seats more comfortable, the audience to lie back further and have tended to induce a passive rather than an active involvement of the audience. A particular hobby horse of mine is the crown (squab) height of the seats. You are sitting in seats in this Conference room with a 450 mm (18”) crown height. I have to say that has been the crown height (that is the height of the front edge of the seat) of theatre seating for about 60 years. And our average height has gone up more than six inches (150 mm)! The result is



that we tend to stretch our legs further forward. We tend to take a more relaxed posture.

We are therefore taking up more space in the auditorium and if we could raise the seat height and stiffen the seat backs a bit, we would actually have more people in less space, and that has to be a win/win situation. Especially as the audience are going to be more involved in the show. I think Peter Brook was searching for this aspect of design when he mentioned that comfort is the least important thing in a theatre. Mind you, he does take it to extremes perhaps. Cushions on the floor are not my idea of theatre, but, on the other hand, there is a truth in there.

### The olfactory effect

I also wanted to mention the sense of smell. How many of us have been conditioned in our expectation of the performance we are about to see by the smell of the foyers as we enter the building? There are some theatres where I reckon I could increase the turnover by 10% simply by changing the smell. There is also a lot of talk about auditoria with good air circulation. Keeping the air clean is a very important thing. It is a very important factor in nearly universal air from underground spaces because of this

Two views of the Rose Theatre in Kingston upon Thames which is scheduled to open late in 2007

Photos: Chris Pearsall, courtesy the Kingston Theatre Trust

**Theatre consultant Michael Holden, lighting designer Jim Morse and acoustic consultant Nick Edwards explore the many factors in addition to shape and architecture that affect the ambience of an auditorium. Here, Michael considers form, seating and smell!**