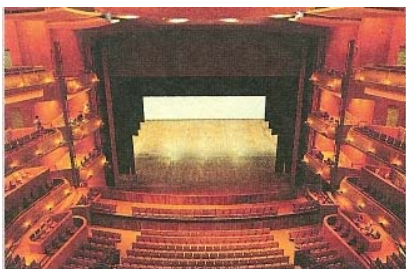


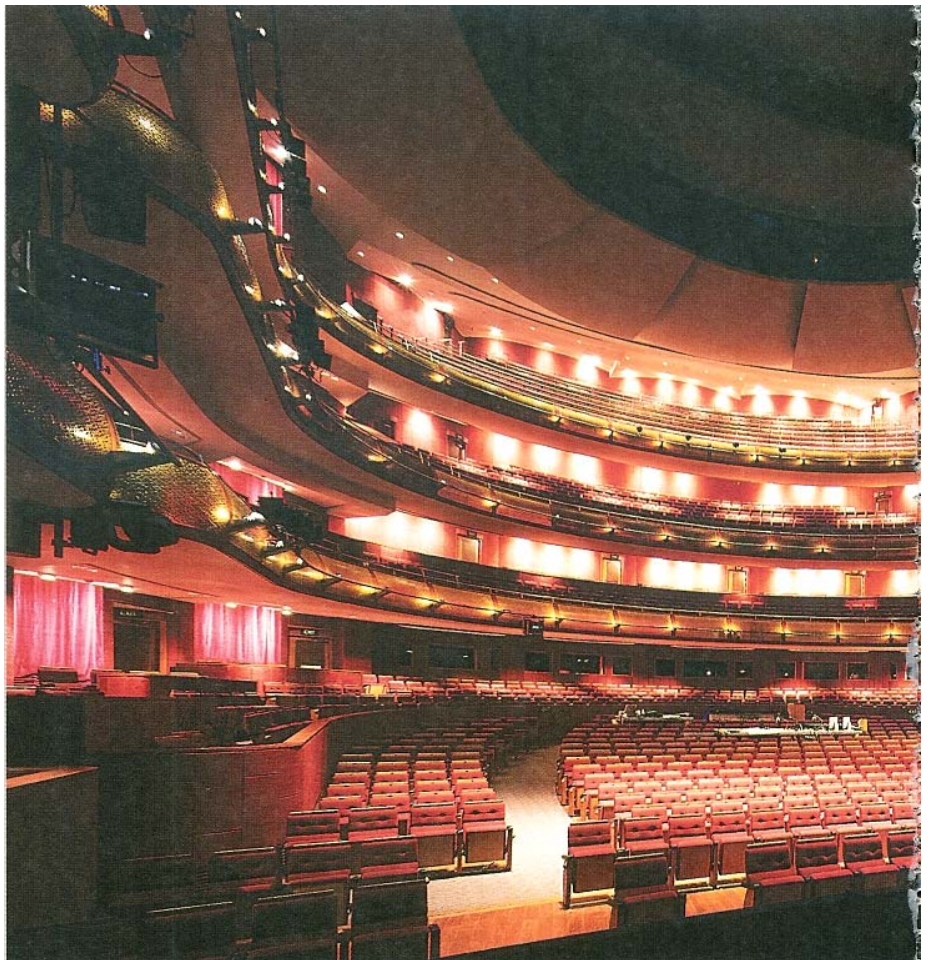
While much attention has been centred around Esplanade's visible and highly distinctive exterior, the real stars are the performing spaces. The centre was designed "from the inside out" - in other words, the quality of the halls took priority. What was needed to ensure that they were first-class halls in terms of acoustics, seating and performance space was the first consideration. This determined the volume of the space, the shape and what was needed to construct halls of exceptional quality.

Although there were functional pre-requisites, designing and building an arts centre is as much art as it is science. And in Singapore, the boundaries between art and science is further complicated by issues of culture. In a multi-cultural society like Singapore, performing spaces have to meet acoustical and technical requirements for different genres and cultures. The building itself has to reflect the country's identity. Now that the arts centre has opened its doors to all Singaporeans after more, than 10 years since the project took off, only time will tell if the people will embrace Esplanade as a symbol of their own aspirations and the nation's pride.

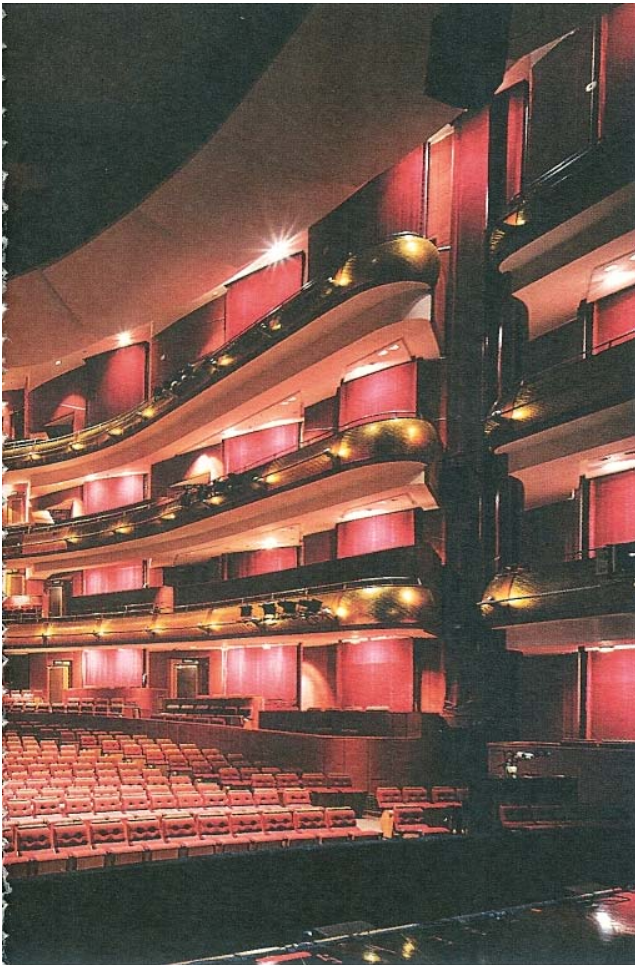


David Staples, managing director of Theatre Planning Consultants, in charge of putting together the overall brief and took the lead in the design of the Theatre and the smaller spaces, says what a hall must have is the "wow" factor:

"Auditoriums are very complex three-dimensional spaces; you don't encounter auditorium-like spaces in your everyday life. Its parallel is possibly grand old churches or cathedrals, which you go in and look into, and you go "wow". When you go into a grand or wonderful theatre, you should go in, look around and go "wow" as well; it's got to have a "wow" effect.



Our view in designing theatres looks backwards and forwards. Our work is very much informed by history, by looking at good or great theatre buildings of the past. Theatre architecture and theatre design went through a very bad period post-war, 1950s and 1960s particularly, and made a number of mistakes. One of the things we have learned is that auditoriums must be three-dimensional. So you've got to stack the audience up to get them closer to the stage, and also with the audience wrapped around the sides of the room towards the stage in boxes, galleries, seating along the side walls. Those seats on the side walls are very important in linking and connecting the performer



to the bulk of the audience. Without them, you'll have big blank side walls and the performer tends to be cut off from his/her audience.

Another belief is to make the space as small as possible. Again, the closer we can get the audience to the stage, the more contact they've got, the better the experience is going to be. The performer in a theatre is never going to be more than 1.8 metres high, and therefore an auditorium has to do everything it can to make that person look, sound, appear bigger; you don't want to dwarf them with huge hall.

There is also the question of looking to the future as well. The arts is changing because of new technologies and experiments. Concert halls and theatres have got to be able to accommodate the future for the arts. One tries to take account of and make allowances for new media, new technology, innovation by putting in infrastructure, bandwidth, communications, power and adequate space. In a successful theatre, the majority of seats has absolutely first-class sight lines. But in order to create a good three-dimensional auditorium, it is essential to have some seats at the side of the auditorium which may not have direct sight-lines.

In terms of the shape of the halls, both the concert hall and theatre follow time-tested precedents. The concert hall is a "shoebox" shape and basically it's for the performance of fine classical music and this form is believed by many people to be the best. Good concert halls such as The Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and the Boston Symphony Hall are in the shoebox format. The theatre is basically a horse-shoe shape and its influences are the classical European opera houses, the Royal Opera in Covent Garden, the Garnier Opera in Paris, La Scala Milan. The shape, from the proscenium arch, resembles a horse-shoe and this form has proven to be very good for opera, theatre, ballet and musicals. Those are the underlying shapes of the rooms, but the rooms themselves are the modern interpretations."