

**SYDNEY  
THEATRE  
CO**

# **Wharf Renewal Project Media Kit**





**STC acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land on which the company gathers. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with whom we work and with whom we share stories.**

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**Above:** The ceiling of the long walk.



**Left:** The Wharf from the pier

# Wharf Renewal Project

In February 2021, Sydney Theatre Company officially reopened its premises at The Wharf, welcoming audiences for the first time since 2018 to its newly renovated home on Sydney Harbour.

The 100-year-old timber shipping wharf at Walsh Bay - which was first transformed from a wool store to an award-winning theatre-making space in the 1980s - has been upgraded once again to improve facilities and access and to modernise the theatre spaces. The result is an entirely new, world class facility that houses the entire theatre-making process under one roof and provides vastly improved experiences for artists, workers and audiences, while preserving the magnificent heritage details that give the venue its unique character.

The renovation project was initiated in 2013 by Executive Director, Patrick McIntyre and then Artistic Director, Andrew Upton to address three decades of continuous wear and tear, the growth and change of STC's business operations and the need for operational, technological and environmental efficiency, as well as an opportunity to create a world class theatre experience for artists, workers and audiences.

STC's Wharf Renewal Project builds on 30 years of history. STC's first Artistic

Director Richard Wherrett, who oversaw the original design of The Wharf theatres, acknowledged at the time that artistic compromises had to be made.

He wrote: "In my original discussions with designing architect Vivian Fraser, I had wanted what is now called Wharf 1 to be a more fully flexible space in which the seats could be removed and replaced in any configuration the director wanted, but the money wouldn't stretch to that."

The STC Wharf Renewal Project was made possible with the generous support of the NSW Government and private donors.

STC's long-awaited return home to The Wharf was marked by the critically acclaimed world premiere of Kate Mulvany's adaptation of Ruth Park's classic Sydney novel, *Playing Beatie Bow*, directed by STC Artistic Director, Kip Williams. This beloved Australian story is set in The Rocks, an historic Sydney precinct that surrounds the company's harbourside home. This stunning production was the fifth STC has opened since September 2020 following a sixth month closure precipitated by the COVID-19, and the first to perform to 100% capacity in the state of NSW since the pandemic closed theatres worldwide in 2020.



# Project consultants

The renovation - known as the STC Wharf Renewal Project - was guided by significant consultation from a cohort of theatre-makers and designers who work regularly with the Company. Their knowledge and love of the building and their experience as artists were instrumental forces in shaping a vision for the future of The Wharf. This artistic input, together with the input of STC staff and audiences, was teamed with the expertise of specialist consultants including Hassell (architect), Charcoalblue (theatre consultant), Tropman & Tropman Architects (heritage architect), with construction completed by Richard Crookes Construction.

## Hassell

Founded in 1938, Hassell is an Australian architecture firm that combines creative design expertise with capabilities in strategy, research, technology and experience design. Principal architect on the Wharf Renewal Project Glenn Scott is an internationally recognised specialist in designing and planning city-defining public places like sports and entertainment centres.

"The Hassell team is honoured to have worked with STC over the last eight years from the initial briefing phase helping develop the 'all-under-one-roof' philosophy, through detailed design and construction to witness its successful reopening. The STC Wharf Renewal Project is a rare, culturally important, heritage project that is a huge responsibility for a design team to work on - we are delighted with

the outcome, and proud that STC can continue their ground-breaking theatre at The Wharf well into the future"

GLENN SCOTT, HASSELL PRINCIPAL

## Charcoalblue

Charcoalblue is a leading integrated Theatre, Acoustic and Digital Consultancy service established in the UK in 2004. The Company - composed of designers, strategists, musicians, acousticians, developers, creatives and technologists - operates as a collaborative team across six international studios in the UK, US and Australia. Key consultants on the Wharf renewal Project have been senior partner Gavin Green, managing partner Andy Hayles and Australasia partner Eric Lawrence.

"This has always been a special project for us at Charcoalblue - it involves all

the project complexities we enjoy! A determined producing client, not afraid to challenge us and ask for the impossible; an important cultural site within the city; a wonderfully rich historic building with decades of audience and company history (plus a few ghosts!); a design brief to enable unlimited flexibility without compromise - all summed up by an aspiration to be 'Better but not Different'. Charcoalblue are immensely proud of the project, it represents genuine consultation between client, architect and ourselves. We hope to have captured the spirit of the company

and weaved our work within the constraints of the original Wharf to craft a series of intimate, flexible theatre spaces, improved acoustics, technical upgrades and efficient and safe working conditions, all the while respecting the unique character of this extraordinary building. The innovative design looks to the future whilst being informed by the history which is at the heart of this building and the stories its occupants share with the audiences".

GAVIN GREEN, CHARCOALBLUE'S  
SENIOR PARTNER AND CO-FOUNDER



Above: Stairs to Wharf 1 Theatre



**Right:** Dressing rooms for the new Wharf Theatres

# Improvements at a glance

- Three additional lifts - two along The Wharf for greater public accessibility and one new goods lift (there are now four lifts in total)
- Three flexible seating configurations in Wharf 1 - End On, Corner and In the Round - with up to 100 more seats in Wharf 1 theatre
- Retractable seating bays for multipurpose spaces
- More than double the number of toilets and increased number of accessible toilets
- Assistive listening systems have been upgraded and extended to include rehearsal rooms
- Ramp/lift access to 95 per cent of the building, including at the Bar, theatre and Back of House (BOH) entry points
- Rehearsal spaces are vastly improved, including better acoustics and larger floorspace
- Addition of music/vocal coaching rooms and a recording studio
- Health and safety improved through better ventilation systems
- Wharf 4/5 is the only remaining timber wharf in Sydney where you can see end to end internally
- Extra balcony space (gantries) off the Bar and at the Atrium
- Acknowledging the heritage of the building, a mid-wharf Atrium now allows an east-west view in the middle of the building for the first time
- The ceiling height in the workshop has been raised to allow sets to be built in full height for the first time
- New BOH corridor which allows greater operational efficiency moving sets from workshop into rehearsal and theatre spaces
- The lighting rig in Wharf 1 can now be lowered to the ground which is safer for technicians
- Larger kitchen and more storage space for The Theatre Bar at the End of the Wharf
- Administrative offices have been updated to reflect changing business practice and staff size
- New multipurpose space The Neilson Family Gallery above the The Theatre Bar at the End of the Wharf for education, functions and venue hire
- State-of-the-art sound system, the first of its kind to be installed in a theatre in the southern hemisphere



**Left:** The Atrium leading to Admin and back of house areas

## IMPROVEMENTS IN DETAIL

# Better theatres and rehearsal spaces

STC's Wharf Renewal Project delivers modernised Wharf 1 and Wharf 2 Theatres with flexible seating configurations, just as Richard Wherrett had envisaged. These spaces are designed to be responsive to distinctive theatrical visions, offering artists more scope of expression and providing audiences with a greater range of theatre experiences and a higher level of amenity.

While the initial driver for the redevelopment was much needed improvements and replacements after 30 years of wear and tear, the Company saw an opportunity to re-invent the theatre spaces to provide a broader range of experiences for artists and audiences. In addition to incorporating flexible seating to enable different configurations of playing space, a unique new space was created by locating to the two theatres side by side and separated by a removable wall. This design idea has been made possible by the inclusion of two Skyfold doors which create the walls that separate the two theatre spaces. The Skyfold doors are an

acoustic partition which disappear into the ceiling. Throughout the development and design of the project, a focus was also retained on improving accessibility, safety, acoustics and operational efficiency all the while preserving and enhancing the heritage characteristics of the site.

The larger of the two theatres - Wharf 1 - can now seat anywhere between 350 and 420 depending on the configuration. The theatre previously had a seating capacity of 320. There are three main seating configurations in the Wharf 1 Theatre - End On, Corner and In the Round - although endless opportunities exist to expand on these capabilities in the future with the flexible decking (provided by German company Hoac) and seating system custom-designed for STC by Belgian company Jezet. The Corner configuration replicates the old Wharf 1 design but with improved sightlines and a larger stage area.

The smaller Wharf 2 Theatre (160 capacity) now has retractable seating so the space can be converted to a rehearsal or multipurpose room in under an hour.



**Above:** Rehearsal spaces during pre production for *Playing Beatie Bow*

The rehearsal spaces have been vastly improved with better acoustics and larger floorspace, as well as the addition of music/vocal coaching rooms and a recording studio.

Wharf 1 now has six dressing rooms, as well as dedicated toilet, shower and laundry facilities. There is a separate wig room and a private green room. Wharf 2 now has three dressing rooms, dedicated toilet & shower plus laundry and kitchenette.

The Neilson Family Gallery is a new space above The Bar at the End of the Wharf that can be used for School Drama™

education, workshops, rehearsals, functions and external venue hire.

The Wharf 1 theatre is now home to the first immersive Meyer Sound Spacemap Go system to be installed in the southern hemisphere, which makes it easier for composers and sound designers to create surround sound experiences and offers them a far greater range of sound system control.



## IMPROVEMENTS IN DETAIL

# Enhanced visitor experience

**STC's Wharf Renewal Project opens up The Wharf to the public in new and improved ways, while staying true to the building's important heritage and much-loved character.**

**Left:** The long walk post-show

- The walk along the length of the Wharf from street to theatre is an iconic part of Sydney's architectural and cultural fabric and a rare experience in the repurposed finger wharves in the city. This wonderful walk has been maintained and remains accessible to the public
- Two new accessible public entries via lifts, one midway along The Wharf and one at the Bar which will allow visitors to enter the building from the harbourside promenade. There is also a new goods lift
- Assistive listening systems have been upgraded and extended to include rehearsal rooms
- New ramp for access to the balcony from The Theatre Bar at the End of the Wharf
- Improved foyer spaces and more efficient paths of travel
- The inside of the theatres have been upgraded for better comfort and accessibility
- The balcony off The Theatre Bar at the End of the Wharf has been extended and a stairway to access the venue from the harbour promenade has been added
- More than double the number of toilets and accessible toilets

Photo: Brett Boardman

**Right:** Wharf 1 Theatre

## IMPROVEMENTS IN DETAIL

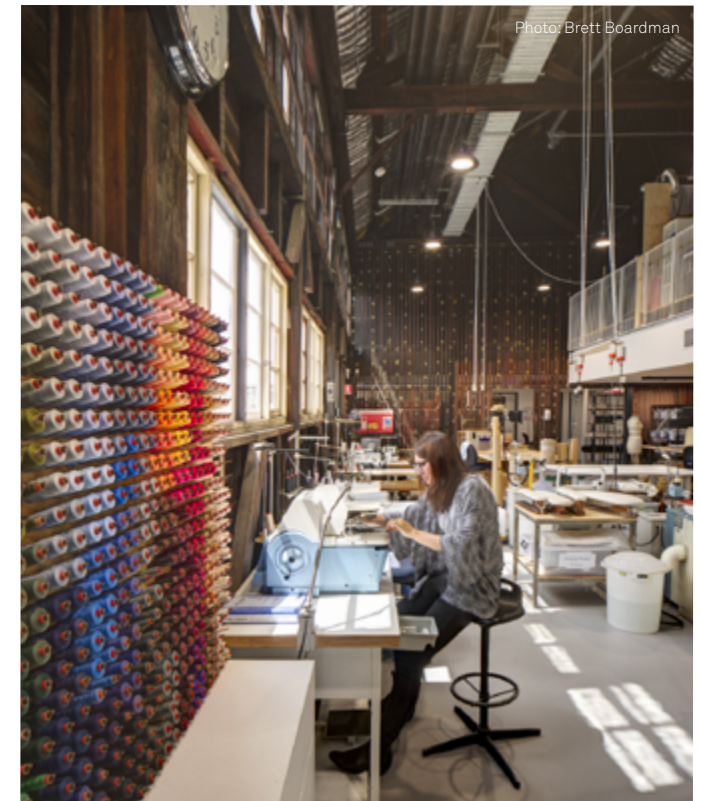
# Behind-the-scenes improvements

**Over the past 30 years, as STC has continued to grow its artistic output, the demands on facilities behind the scenes have grown too. STC's Wharf Renewal Project has created spaces that match the work done across all areas of the Company.**

- The ceiling height in the workshop has been raised to allow larger sets to be built
- New BOH corridor which allows greater operational efficiency moving sets from workshop into rehearsal and theatre spaces
- Health and safety has improved through better ventilation
- The lighting rig can now be lowered to the ground which is safer for Technicians
- Theatres painted with STC-designed Blitz Total Sealer paint, a cheaper and more environmentally-friendly paint product developed by our Head of Scenic Art Neil Mallard during lockdown when paint supply imports were limited
- 900 new 390W Solar KuMax panels installed, twice the output of the original solar panels
- A 100,000 litre storage capacity rainwater harvesting system captures some 80% of the rainwater that falls on STC's vast roof. It captures and provides non-potable water to all the artistic companies on Wharf 4/5
- Administrative offices fitted with LED, energy saving lights that switch off after not sensing movement



**Above:** Workshop spaces



**Right:** Costume department





## STC's history at The Wharf

From its inception in 1978, Sydney Theatre Company operated out of several rented premises around the city before deciding in 1984 to find a singular location that could house both a theatre and all the Company's activities.

After an extensive search, STC's then administrator Elizabeth Butcher proposed one of the city's iconic yet derelict Walsh Bay "finger wharves" - originally built in the early twentieth century and opened for shipping in 1921 - as STC's new home.

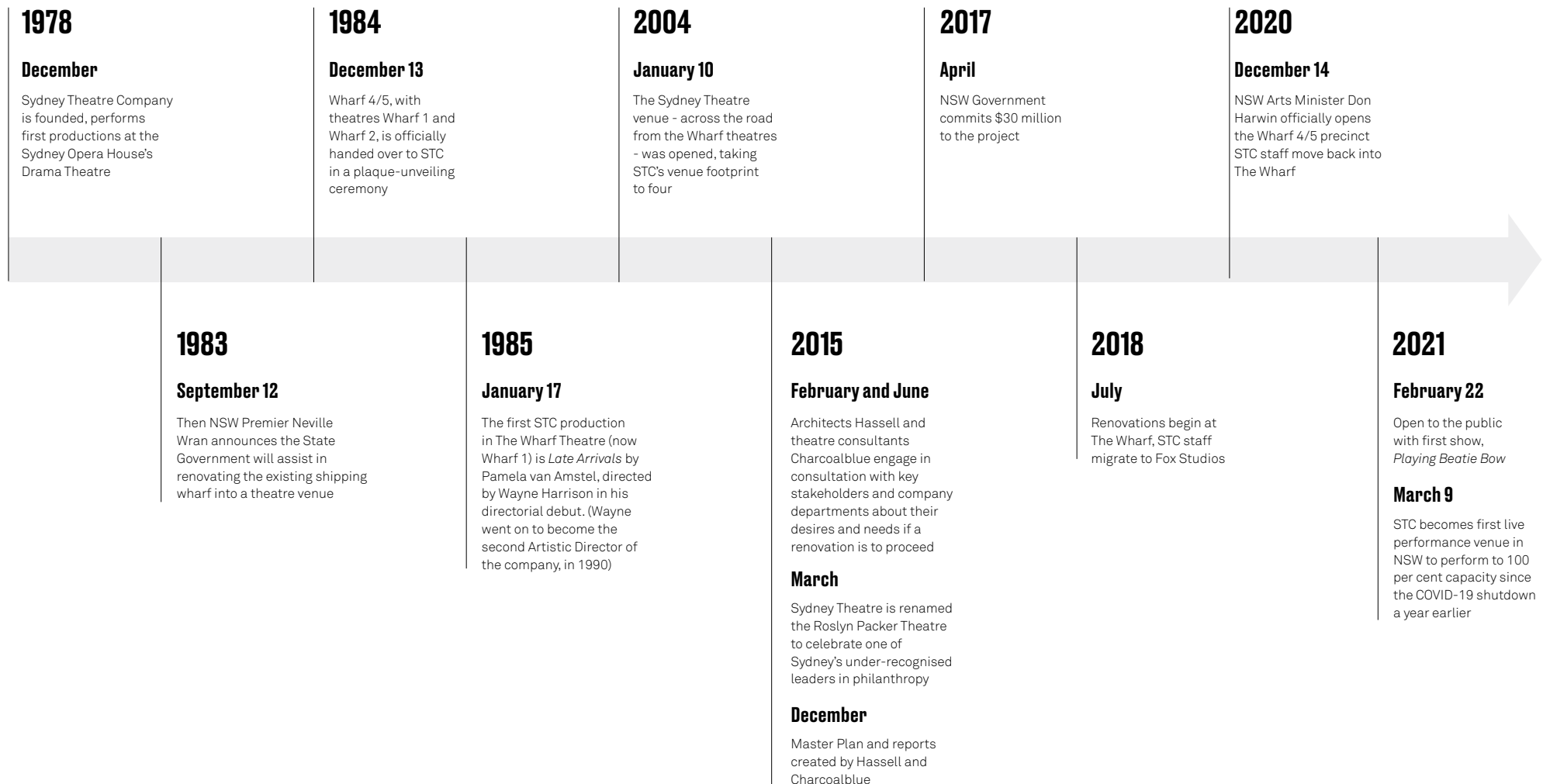
The now heritage-listed, ironbark timber wharf warehouse had mainly served as a wool store until the 70s and stood abandoned for 10 years before being officially handed over to STC on December 13, 1984. Led by architect Vivian Fraser, the approximately 8500m<sup>2</sup> space was

converted into premises suitable for creating, producing, performing and enjoying theatre, without sacrificing its historical integrity or context.

Since STC's opening at Walsh Bay in 1984, the area has been transformed into one of the city's premiere arts precincts. Other performing arts companies and organisations now enjoy headquarters at The Wharf, including Sydney Dance Company, Sydney Philharmonia Choirs, Gondwana Choirs, Sydney Children's Choir, The Song Company, Australian Theatre for Young People, Regional Arts, Accessible Arts and Bangarra Dance Theatre.

In 2008, after nearly a quarter of a century's use, The Wharf was presented the RAIA 25 Year Award for Enduring Architecture by the Institute.

# Timeline





# About Sydney Theatre Company

Our founding Artistic Director Richard Wherrett said: “Sydney Theatre Company exists to provide first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney...theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun.” A paradox as playful as our city.

With each successive Artistic Director following Wherrett’s departure in 1990 has come a different interpretation of his idiosyncratic mission statement, creating a company with a distinctive voice and an adventurous audience.

Since its inception in 1978, Sydney Theatre Company has offered audiences an eclectic program of Australian plays, interpretations of the classic repertoire and the best of new international writing. The Company seeks to produce theatre of the highest standard that consistently illuminates, entertains and challenges, and shares its work widely through regional, national and international touring, partnerships and outreach activities.

Over the years, acclaimed artists such as Cate Blanchett, Toni Collette, Hugo Weaving, Barrie Kosky, Deborah Mailman, Richard Roxburgh, Sarah Snook, Yael Stone and Rose Byrne have made work with STC; and the

Company often collaborates with many renowned international practitioners including Benedict Andrews, Howard Davies, Declan Donnellan, Liv Ullmann, Steven Soderbergh and Tamás Ascher.

Our four home venues - two theatres at The Wharf, the Roslyn Packer Theatre and the Drama Theatre at the Sydney Opera House - range in size from 160 to 890 seat capacities and allow us to develop and celebrate theatrical expression of all kinds.

Offstage, STC adds to the creative capacity of the community via programs that provide learning not just about but through theatre. This happens through School Drama™, its in-schools literacy course devised in partnership with The University of Sydney, its Connected program for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, and its Juvenile Justice program which delivers drama workshops to young people who are incarcerated.

With around 300,000 ticket sales in Sydney each year, and more on tour around the country and the world, STC is one of Australia’s foremost performing arts institutions, and one of the largest not-for-profit theatre companies in the world.



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