



# Jonathan Tuckey Design

**PRESS ENQUIRIES**

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**PRESS RELEASE**

## **DAVID BROWNLOW THEATRE, HARRIS HILL SCHOOL NEWBURY, BERKSHIRE**

**11/2020**

Jonathan Tuckey Design has completed a new theatre in the grounds of a school in south east England.

True to the practice's commitment to 'building on the built', for which it has earned an international reputation, the new development is a masterclass in repairing and enhancing the existing campus. The new, sustainable building has been carefully crafted to sit in concert with the neighbouring buildings, and succeeds in turning what was once a featureless car park into an animated civic square.

Harris Hill is a day and boarding preparatory school for boys aged between 4 and 13, set within a rural campus in Berkshire. It is located in 85 acres containing woods, sports pitches and a kitchen garden. Outdoor education and extra-curricular activity are fundamental parts of the school, both of which help Harris Hill maintain a whole-school community ethos.

The theatre, which is named after its main benefactor, Lord David Brownlow, founder of the David Brownlow Charitable Foundation, will significantly enhance the personal development of the 130 pupils attending Harris Hill. It will afford access to all aspects of theatre practice: performance, production and design – and embed these into the culture of the school. Outside of teaching hours, the new theatre will open up to the wider community through local theatre clubs and groups, providing facilities to sustain these activities at a time when countless arts venues are closing across the UK.

Designed to host school assemblies, music recitals and drama productions, the development comprises three unique spaces, creating a building which is animated on all sides, activating the whole campus. The three spaces include:

- a 160-seat auditorium and performance space;
- a congregating space around the entrance portico;
- an outdoor amphitheatre on the south elevation, facing the woods and school playing fields, which extends the theatre stage into the surrounding Arcadian landscape.

The design was the outcome of an invited competition, won by the practice in March 2016. The brief called for a theatre that would expand the arts and drama curriculum at the school – in recognition that performing arts improve pupils' confidence, grasp of languages, debating skills, oratory and aptitude.

The theatre replaces a modular cabin built in the 1970s on the western side of the campus. The new building is positioned at a slight angle from its surroundings, to embrace the latent urbanity of the site, creating a civic square within the existing collection of buildings.

Jonathan Tuckey Design has employed natural materials to create a passively ventilated theatre which sits harmoniously within the wooded setting of the campus. It is constructed of cross-laminated timber (CLT), an engineered wood structural system, and clad with Viroc wood fibre panelling. The CLT frame was chosen for its cost effectiveness and to reduce construction time on site; its specification has ensured a saving of 40 tonnes of CO2 compared to traditional blockwork.

The theatre draws from its surroundings not by replication of the local vernacular, but by being consciously distinct in materiality and structure. However, the warm red hue of the Viroc elevations roots the theatre in among the earthy brick of the neighbouring Victorian buildings and more recent additions.

The design is innovative in its use and articulation of sheet materials and flat surfaces. The Viroc was machine cut off-site from sheets to reduce waste, and pieced together by hand as one object of joinery.

A tall portico structure announces the theatre from the main point of arrival to the north and activates the new civic square in front. It will be used as a billboard to announce theatre productions and functions as an assembly space for small groups of pupils.

Inside, the CLT frame is left exposed and lined with beech battens of varying depths to reference the articulation of the external façade. The repetition of battens is more regimented at the base to emphasise the solidity of the structure, and diffused as it ascends to create a sense of a firmament in the upper part of the theatre. Light grey acoustic panels are introduced throughout to absorb sound and prevent echoes.

The undulating ceiling, finished in a deep dark blue to represent the night sky, has been acoustically modelled to project sound from the stage into the auditorium. The floor is black polished Viroc, cut into a pattern to reference the ornate stone floors of Renaissance churches.

The arrival sequence is through an entrance lobby, acoustic threshold and entrance corridor into the auditorium with the stage, backstage area and loading bay to the rear. Storage and toilets are concealed beneath the raked seating accessed from the entrance lobby.

The project draws inspiration from Christine Boyer's book, *The City of Collective Memory*, in its recognition that the theatre will be a stage set for everyday life. The design borrows historical motifs such as the standing stalls of Tudor theatre, classical theatre proscenium and colonnade, as well as motifs from Renaissance ecclesiastical architecture.

Jonathan Tuckey, Director, Jonathan Tuckey Design, said:

*"It feels rare to me to have experienced such alignment between all those involved in the creation of this theatre. The headmaster and governors' visionary commitment to the role of theatre in the heart of the school was an inspring genesis to this project. From that point on, the theatre was the result of really fruitful collaboration between client, pupils, teachers, donors, design and construction teams. There were, of course, obstacles along the way: fundraising, Brexit, insolvencies, tempestuous rain, a pandemic – all of which only heighten the pleasure of seeing the building in use. For our part we are very proud to have united the two parts of the school campus with a building for congregating, whether on the amphitheatre steps in the sun or in the auditorium for a concert."*

Giles Tollit, Headmaster, Horris Hill, said:

*"It is a fabulous building, and it has already significantly enhanced the quality of the education we are providing – not just the drama, but also lectures: staff are beginning to explore the technical capabilities and the standard of the in-house lectures is rising every day. A recent event saw the top three years spellbound by a great lecture on (of all things) West Side Story, that weaved video, music and stills, as well as the member of staff speaking on stage, with two boys in the technical box working the buttons – utterly brilliant."*

Marina Lund, Chair, Horris Hill Governors, said:

*"Horris Hill has never lacked ambition. For a small, all-boys prep school nestled in the Berkshire countryside, it has consistently 'punched above its weight'. It is school that celebrates the individual and allows boys to grow and develop, supported yet challenged, in all aspects of the curriculum. Jonathan Tuckey Design immediately grasped the sense of community at Horris Hill and the binding presence that a theatre could bring to the school. It has been a collaborative and rewarding process. The new theatre is contemporary, but sits well within the surrounding Victorian buildings, and its simplicity reflects the ethos of the school. Already in constant use, it is a phenomenal resource for the school and the local community."*

**Press enquiries:**

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**NOTES TO EDITORS**

<b>Address:</b>	Newtown, Newbury, Berkshire, RG20 9DJ
<b>Project area:</b>	528m <sup>2</sup> (theatre, amphitheatre, colonnade, portico)
<b>Theatre internal area:</b>	320m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Construction value:</b>	£1,742,790
<b>Cost per sqm:</b>	£3,300 per m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Project schedule:</b>	March 2016 – Sept 2020
<b>Construction:</b>	Aug 2019 – Sept 2020
<b>Architects:</b>	Jonathan Tuckey Design
<b>Design team:</b>	Jonathan Tuckey, Peter Youthed, Rob Leechmere, James Moore, Molly Wheeler, Matthew Farrer, Belen Salgado, Rohullah Kazemi, Waheed Kazemi
<b>Project architects:</b>	James Moore and Rob Leechmere
<b>Structural engineers:</b>	Webb Yates Engineers
<b>M&amp;E:</b>	Skelly and Couch Ltd
<b>Theatre consultant:</b>	Charcoalblue
<b>QS:</b>	Marstan BDB LLP
<b>Contractor:</b>	Vale Southern Construction Ltd
<b>Joinery:</b>	Peak Carpentry
<b>Competition organiser:</b>	RedBook Agency
<b>Photography:</b>	© Nick Dearden, © Jim Stephenson



### **Jonathan Tuckey Design**

Jonathan Tuckey founded the award-winning London practice in 2000. Jonathan Tuckey Design, now a team of 16, has garnered an international reputation for working with existing buildings and structures. The studio has expertise in combining contemporary design with layers of built heritage, to explore the ways in which old and new can co-exist and elevate one another.

JTD embraces an architecture of change, grounded in an acute awareness of style and context. The considered juxtaposition of contemporary elements with original features creates a dialogue between different eras, and allows buildings to take on new purpose. Reusing existing built stock is the most sustainable approach to the development of our cities and countryside, and fosters a sense of collective heritage.

Projects for individual homes, including Collage House (2011), The Yard, Dulwich (2014) and Egg, Knightsbridge (2015), have led to the development of a clear set of principles and approaches towards working with historic and modern architecture, which has resulted in larger scale commercial commissions, including Wachthuus, Switzerland (2020), Nossenhaus, Switzerland (2016), Gasholders, King's Cross, London (2018) and Michelberger Hotel, Berlin (2018).

The practice has always been active in the cultural and education sectors, with the refurbishment of Unicorn Primary School (2004) and the development of an after-school activities centre for Wilberforce Primary School (2011). The Southbank Centre Archive in the Royal Festival Hall – a free-standing, self-supporting structure which puts the work of the archivists on public display – is the practice's most visible contribution to the arts.

A focus on materials, craftsmanship and proportion, and sensitivity to the soulfulness and idiosyncrasies of historic architecture, led to the establishment of Building on the Built in 2016. The programme of exhibitions and talks explores unfamiliar architectural responses to existing structures from around the world and close to home. The series is hosted in the practice's studio, which is the conversion of a former west London pub into studio, gallery and lecture space (2017).

[jonathantuckey.com](http://jonathantuckey.com)



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