

## What does a theatre design consultant do?

The daily grind of a theatre consultant will, naturally, depend on who she's working for and what sort of projects she's working on. But if we consider the typical theatre consultant, she may spend her days writing the program (or brief) for the building, meeting with the architect and engineers, designing the audience chamber or the motorized flying system, writing the technical specifications, reviewing the thousands (yes, literally thousands) of sheets of drawings it takes to describe a theatre building, and visiting the site to review the contractor's work. This all makes for a varied and busy day, but are we any closer to understanding her role?

Let's think instead about a theatre consultant as a person with three hats: advocate, translator, and educator.

When she's wearing her advocate hat, the theatre consultant is thinking about what the owner is trying to achieve and what the users—performers, stage crew, ticket takers, maintenance staff, audience, everyone using the building—need. And she's considering those needs when the building opens and for 20 years after. She has worked in the theatre herself, and she knows what's needed for theatres to work safely and efficiently—so she's ready to review every decision during planning and construction with the question “How will this work for the people using the building?”

The theatre consultant is a linguist when she wears the translator hat. She speaks the language of the theatre, the architect's studio, and the construction site. She is often literally a translator of each industry's jargon. More importantly, she understands the needs of the performing artists and the world of design and construction. She can help the artist communicate his needs to the building designers at the right time and in the right words. She can help the designers and builders understand those needs and their effect on the building.

From her position in the middle, she may also become an educator. She may be one of the few on the project with an understanding of theatre practice and the design and construction process. She shares practical information about the function and uses of a theatre with the design and construction teams—who, understandably, are not involved in this building type every day. Similarly, a construction project may be a once-in-a-lifetime event for the owner and users—the theatre consultant is their guide through the complexities of the building design and construction process.

So, in practical terms, how does the theatre consultant fulfill her role as advocate, translator, and educator? In addition to serving as a resource of information from her combined experiences in theatre and design/construction, her work usually includes:

- Feasibility studies
- Space programming to determine the type, size, and quantity of spaces required
- Sightline studies and building planning, including the shape, size, and adjacency relationships of the auditorium, stage, and front of house and back of house spaces
- Design and specification of theatrical equipment, seating, and stage floor construction
- Quality control reviews of design and construction drawings and contractor submittals
- Construction observation, to evaluate compliance with the original intent

So, our theatre consultant thrives at the crossroads of the building process, promoting communications and understanding between the designers/builders and the users of the facility. She's knowledgeable about theatres and how they work, as well as the complexities of the construction process. Ultimately, she wants to help create the best possible theatre. She'll use her experience and her central position to everyone's advantage to get there.