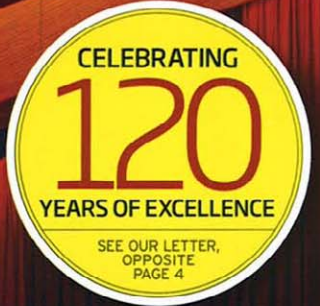


# ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

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NEW  
ACTS

A Theater, an Opera House,  
and a Concert Hall



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## PERFORMING ARTS CENTERS

# Bold New Acts

IN THE HALCYON YEARS before the harrowing arrival of the current recession, new performing arts centers seemed to be rivaling museums as the architectural building type du jour. Now that spurt of activity may dwindle as cultural and academic institutions scramble to shore up their budgets. But in this moment of enforced reflection, we can at least examine some of the fruits of architecture's golden decade up to 2009 to see how they perform urbanistically, architecturally, and acoustically.

The Dee and Charles Wyly Theatre by REX/OMA, the Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House by Foster and Partners (both part of the AT&T Performing Arts Center in Dallas), and the Copenhagen Concert Hall by Ateliers Jean Nouvel each attempt to advance the state of the art of a distinct building type. The Wyly Theatre's complicated

structural solution reflects the desire for purely flexible stage maneuvering. Nearby, the Winspear Opera House inserts in a modern architectural setting a horseshoe plan first developed in Venice when Carlo Fontana remodeled the Teatro SS. Giovanni e Paolo for an opera house in 1654. To present symphonic music to its audience, Danish Radio's Copenhagen Concert Hall looks only to 1963 to adapt a vineyard plan that Hans Scharoun first developed for the Berlin Philharmonie in Berlin.

All three buildings – a theater, an opera house, and a concert hall – demand different acoustical solutions for mostly unamplified sound, within unconventional architectural envelopes. Because of these complexities, RECORD brings together the acoustical analyses of each for its Continuing Education feature, as explained below. *Suzanne Stephens*

## Continuing Education



Use the following learning objectives to focus your study while reading this month's ARCHITECTURAL RECORD/AIA Continuing Education articles. To earn one AIA learning unit, including one hour of health, safety, and welfare (HSW) credit, read the following project stories and their tech sidebars, "Performing Arts Centers and Acoustics," on pages 57, 66, and 74. To receive credit, turn to page 114 and follow the instructions.

### Learning Objectives

- 1 Understand and define diverse acoustical terminology.
- 2 Explain acoustical characteristics appropriate for various types of performance spaces.
- 3 Describe acoustical analysis and modeling methods.
- 4 Explain strategies for improving acoustical quality.

# Dallas ARTS District

Does an impressive collection of buildings add up to a truly urban neighborhood for the arts?

BY DAVID DILLON



**THIRTY ONE YEARS AND \$1 BILLION** after it began, the Dallas Arts District is nearing completion. The October opening of the AT&T Performing Arts Center, featuring an opera house by Foster + Partners and a theater by REX/OMA, capped three decades of committed, if at times confused, planning and building. Add existing museums by Edward Larrabee Barnes and Renzo Piano, a concert hall from I.M. Pei, and a new Arts Magnet high school by Allied Works Architecture and you have one of finest collections of contemporary art and architecture anywhere – less monolithic and overbearing than Lincoln Center, more coherent and accessible than Los Angeles's Grand Avenue, even with Frank Gehry's Walt Disney Concert Hall. Four Pritzker Prize

winners – count 'em, four! – strut their stuff on Flora Street, the district's main drag, while a fifth, Thom Mayne, is designing the Perot Museum of Nature and Science a few blocks away. As a concentration of marquee architects, this is hard to top.

The district's goals from the start were to legitimize Dallas's claim to be a "city of the arts," revive its moribund downtown, and create a grand civic destination where everyone would feel welcome even without a ticket. The first is within reach, the other two still years away.

The catalyst for this huge investment was a 1978 report by Carr Lynch Associates that called for relocating the city's major cultural facilities – museum, symphony, and opera – from Fair Park, a beloved but marginalized site in predominantly black South Dallas, to a played-out stretch of car dealerships and parking lots on the northern edge of downtown. The rationale was a mix of cultural ambition, economic

desperation, and faintly disguised racism.

Dallas voters rejected the proposal in 1978, only to approve it a year later after furious lobbying by arts organizations and city officials. The Dallas Museum of Art moved first in 1984 with a barrel-vaulted limestone building by Barnes that combined 19th-century civic-mindedness with 20th-century programs and exhibition spaces. Pei followed five years later with the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center, acoustically a dream but politically and financially a nightmare. Then came the privately funded Nasher Sculpture Center in 2003, one of Piano's most refined designs. The Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts opened in 2008, and the \$354 million AT&T Center last fall. A city performance hall, by SOM Chicago, will open in 2011.

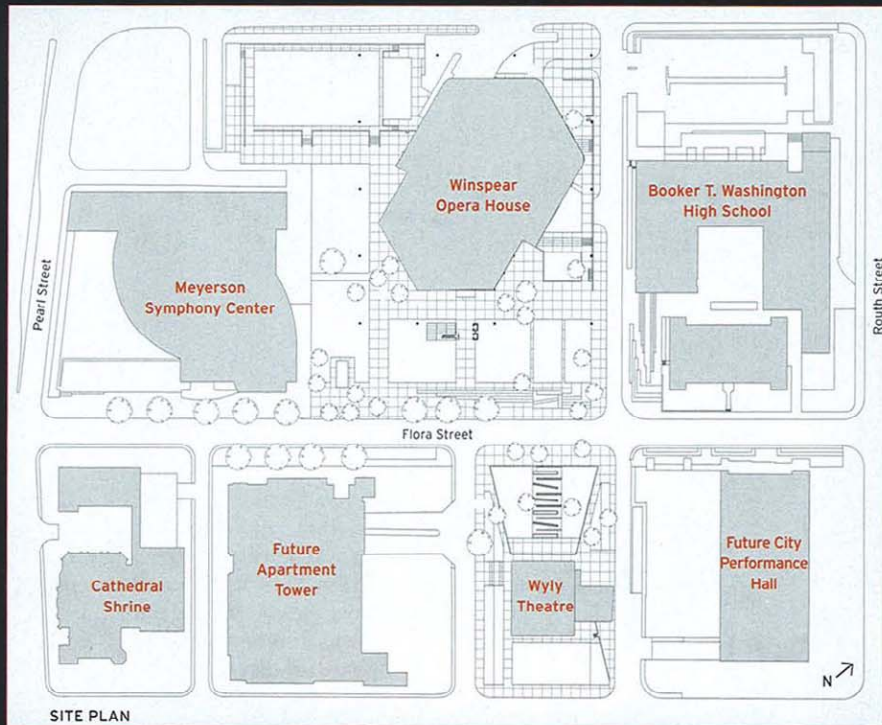
The most surprising thing about AT&T is that it happened at all. Historically, the Arts District had

been a one-step-forward, two-steps-back proposition because of turf wars, budget crises, and political ineptness at city hall. AT&T could have suffered a similar fate. Instead, a cadre of hard-driving arts supporters, led by John Dayton, Deedie Rose, and Bill Lively, took control of the project. They selected the architects, developed the program, and generated new and broader financial support.

"When we built the art museum, the supporters were mostly visual-arts people," recalls Rose. "With the Meyerson, it was mostly symphony people. This time, we had million dollar donations from people who had never been big arts supporters, but who believed that the project was important for the city." Among them were philanthropists Charles Wyly and Bill Winspear, whose names are now attached to the theater and opera house, respectively.

The Winspear and the Wyly have different constituencies and dramatically different personalities. One is traditional and formal, the other edgy and experimental. One recalls La Scala and Covent Garden, the other turns conventional theater inside out and upside down, putting the lobby in the basement and the rehearsal hall on top. Whereas the Wyly celebrates industrial materials and technology, the Winspear offers classical proportions and geometry.

While it is too soon for definitive critical judg-



**LEFT: The Winspear Opera House with its bright red drum and expansive solar canopy stands across Flora Street from the more vertical**

**Wyly Theatre (left in photo) and adjacent to I.M. Pei's Meyerson Symphony Center on one side and an arts high school by Allied Works**

**Architecture on the other. ABOVE: Site plan shows the reach of the Dallas Arts District after 31 years and \$1 billion of construction.**

ments, initial reports on both buildings have been favorable. The Winspear's acoustics, by Sound Space Design, have received enthusiastic reviews from music critics such as Anthony Tommasini of *The New York Times* and Heidi Waleson of *The Wall Street Journal*. And its glowing red drum has been an instant hit with a public famously attracted to spectacle. Most of the complaints have been operational: bottlenecks in the lobby, narrow corridors, long lines on the escalators, and a shortage of restrooms.

The Wyly is getting high marks from directors and performers for its technological versatility, which allows seats and sets to be rearranged at the touch of a button, and the stage to be transformed even between acts. At the same time, some patrons have complained about the tough industrial interiors, and more about the steep concrete ramp leading down to the grim lobby.

Yet, as Carr Lynch pointed out in 1978, architecture is only one piece of an arts district. The goal is not to create memorable buildings or support real estate development, but "to bring the arts into the lives of the people of Dallas, in an immediate and personal way, in the course of everyday life."

And it is here, at the level of everyday life, that the Arts District has work to do. For all the talk about an "urban neighborhood for the arts," it is

still a collection of fiefdoms, each commanding its own block up and down Flora Street. Although the arts institutions occasionally work together on exhibitions and concerts, they mostly advance their own agendas – a situation that needs to change.

"To create a real arts district, we need to think outside the walls of our own institutions," says Nasher director Jeremy Strick. "Public art; outdoor performances; short, quick-hit exhibitions: whatever overcomes institutional inertia." A management organization, called simply Dallas Arts District, has recently been created, and basic marketing tools such as joint ticketing and a one-stop Web site are being explored for the first time.

Street life remains a fantasy, however, with no shops and cafés, only a handful of restaurants, and few public events outside the walls of the cultural institutions. What buzz there is comes mainly from the 800 students in the Arts Magnet high school, and then for only a few hours a day. Most nights and weekends, the "urban neighborhood" is dead.

More housing of all types would instantly energize the district. Right now, it contains only 62 luxury condos in a single high-rise. An apartment building is going up nearby, and a second luxury condo tower may eventually be built. But the district needs several thousand residents, not several

hundred, and it is a long way from that goal.

It also needs more and better connections to the rest of downtown. DART and the city dropped the ball by not including several light-rail stops in the district.

Twenty-five years after the Dallas Museum of Art opened, the Arts District is unquestionably an architectural success. Its individual cultural buildings are all intelligently designed and handsomely crafted, serious rather than merely trendy, the kind of work that helps us to see the city differently. What's less clear is whether all this high design will come together to create a real place where art and daily life meet, or devolve into an architecture fair, a splashy curiosity, that attracts tourists and turns up on the covers of design magazines but does little to nourish the life of the city.

Architecture can do only so much. Without sensitively designed streets, plazas, and landscapes – a so-called "public realm" – even great buildings end up as solitary objects, wonderful to look at but lifeless and forbidding. Dallas has clearly got the architecture piece right. It is the civic and urban design elements that still need work. ■

*Contributing editor David Dillon is the former architecture critic of The Dallas Morning News.*