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Places

Title

New Amsterdam Theatre, New Victory Theater, Theater Row [PLACEMARK Award: Hugh Hardy]

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5jz3q0gc>

Journal

Places, 14(2)

ISSN

0731-0455

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Publication Date

2001-11-01

Peer reviewed

New Amsterdam Theatre,
New Victory Theater



The restoration of two historic theaters not only jump-starts Times Square's recent revival but also enables theatergoers to revel in the area's complex architectural history.



Top: New Amsterdam Theatre signage and interior detail reflect different eras of renovation. Left photo © Chris Lovi, right photo by Whitney Cox, © Disney Enterprises, Inc.

Above: The new theatres, which face each other across the street, were among the first signs of change along redeveloping 42nd Street. Photo © Elliott Kaufman

Theater Row

A careful collaboration between theater companies, theater operators and a residential developer extends Times Square's renewal westward and strengthens its residential community.

After more than a decade of false starts, the Times Square redevelopment burst to life with the opening of the New Victory Theatre in 1995 and the New Amsterdam Theater in 1997. Hardy's "interpretive restorations" became touchstones for public discourse about Times Square's nature, conversations that until then had been colored by distant memories, nostalgia, even myth.

Before the completion of these theaters, the most visible manifestation of change at Times Square was the cacophony of signage erected under special Times Square zoning rules and an interim redevelopment plan for 42nd Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues—urban design initiatives that extrapolated, perhaps exaggerated, one of the brashiest aspects of the area's history.

The restorations, instead, were true to the evolutionary nature of Times Square, not restoring the theaters to any one point in time, not elevating them to mythical status, but embracing the multiple layers of history as evidenced in various architectural modifications.

In the few years since then, nearly every property in the Times Square redevelopment area has been redeveloped, and attention is turning to the surrounding area. Theater Row, a vibrant strip of tiny theaters two blocks west of Times Square, dates back more than twenty-five years, when small theater companies started leasing space in the block. A non-profit group subsequently pur-

chased much of the blockfront and created a theater laboratory for small companies.

The current project will include the construction of six new theaters, varying in size from 83 to 499 seats, rehearsal studios and support spaces, all topped by a forty-story residential building, Theater Tower. Thus the block will continue to provide an incubator for various sizes of productions, yet in fresher, more supportive facilities, and adds to the life of the theater district by increasing the residential presence there.

Just as the Times Square redevelopment demonstrates the constellation of public, civic and private resources that must align to inspire urban regeneration, the Theater Row and Theater Tower project is emblematic of the symbiotic relationship between the arts and urban development. Theater has colonized Times Square over and over again; in recent years, the income from large real-estate projects has been increasingly necessary to underwrite spaces that afford artists full creative liberty. Not surprisingly, it is architecture that steps into the bargain.

—*Todd W. Bressi*



Theatre Row, section, showing weaving of multiple-theatre access lobby, upper-level theatre, and apartments into a complex site. Courtesy Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer