

A NEW THEATRE FOR QUEENSLAND

The Glasshouse Theatre emerged from the growing demand for world-class performance spaces in Queensland. To support its long-term success, QPAC was selected as the site for this new performing arts venue.

Since opening in April 1985, QPAC has delivered exceptional arts experiences for more than 30 million people. The venue plays a significant role in showcasing Queensland as a cultural tourism destination and elevating live performance experiences for Queenslanders and visitors.

In addition to hosting world-class major touring productions, the Glasshouse Theatre enables QPAC to further support the State's performing arts companies and their ambitions – Circa, Dancenorth, Opera Queensland, Queensland Ballet, Queensland Symphony Orchestra and Queensland Theatre Company.

This project was funded by the Queensland Government, through Arts Queensland, alongside investment from QPAC.

- The Glasshouse Theatre makes QPAC the largest performing arts centre under one roof in Australia with the potential to welcome an additional 300,000 visitors to QPAC annually.
- To complement QPAC's existing proscenium arch theatres – the Playhouse (850 seats) and the Lyric Theatre (2,000 seats) – the Glasshouse Theatre has a capacity of 1,500 seats.
- The stage is the same playing size as QPAC's Lyric Theatre, 15m by 15m, enabling QPAC to present more large-scale productions.
- Technical innovations – from foyers to stage to backstage – contribute to world-class performance delivery, quick production changeovers, and exceptional experience for performers and patrons alike.



Download information about the Glasshouse Theatre.

CONNECTION

CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

The design of the Glasshouse Theatre responds to extensive research into the site and context by Aunty Colleen Wall, QPAC Elder in Residence (2019-2022).

Connecting ground to sky became a major influence, with the 7 skylights in the roof representing the 7 watersheds across Queensland. The major skylight is immediately visible upon arrival to the foyers, allowing daylight to flood the spaces along with the curved glass wall.

CONNECTION TO CULTURE

The design recognises the site as a place of storytelling, gathering and culture for thousands of years. In addition to the main theatre, the flexible performance space will be able to stage community performances visible from the neighbouring streets and the courtyard can accommodate small outdoor performances.

The courtyard also houses the 4-metre-high sculpture *Floriante* by Torres Strait Islander artist Brian Robinson. *Floriante* is inspired by Queensland's natural flora and features 7 emblematic flowering plants that grow in abundance across Queensland. They have cultural significance as medicines, food sources and tools, and represent the significant watershed ecosystems that connect with Maiwar (Brisbane River).

CONNECTION TO THE RIVER

The undulating glass façade was inspired by the prose poem *Kurilpa Country* by respected Elder and artist, Aunty Lilla Watson.

The poem speaks of the river and the Kurilpa – the water rat endemic to the area. It describes how the ripples on the water are caused by wind and tidal surge. The architects' idea was to create the effect of seeing people through rippling water, appearing and blurring as they move through the foyer spaces. *Kurilpa Country* can be viewed at the entry to kuril dhagun on the Ground Floor of the State Library of Queensland.

CONNECTION TO THE LAND

The colours and tones of the interior spaces reflect natural Queensland landscapes.

The foyers with their ochre carpets, rippled concrete walls and expansive glazing evoke the Queensland coast and the subtropics. In contrast, the theatre's locally-sourced grey ironbark walls and the deep green carpets and upholstery are intended to create the sense of containment within a rainforest canopy.



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HERITAGE ASPECTS

The Queensland Cultural Centre was listed on the Queensland Heritage Register in 2015.

The Glasshouse Theatre design respects the existing QPAC building in several ways:

- The configuration of simple cubic masses forming a cohesive composition with the QPAC building, including that of a stepped concrete skyline.
- The alignment of the theatre 'box' – visible through the glass walls – with the external façades of the QPAC theatres.
- The use of a precast concrete colour for the solid forms, which is consistent with the concrete walls of the existing QPAC building.
- A constrained palette of materials and pervasiveness of daylight, which also characterises the QPAC building.
- Functional integration of the Glasshouse Theatre with the loading dock and other back-of-house spaces of QPAC.

It is acknowledged that the Glasshouse Theatre's wavy glass façade geometrically contrasts with QPAC. This recognises that the theatre was designed by a different architect and responds to the desire to impart transparency, offer an outlook to South Bank, optimise daylight, and engage public life with the theatre.

The heritage aspects of the design were scrutinised by an Independent Expert Panel (IEP) throughout the duration of the project.



Download information about the Glasshouse Theatre.

TIMELINE

DESIGN IDEA TO FIRST SHOWS

2018:

The **Queensland Government** announced an international design competition to deliver an outstanding architectural vision for the new theatre.

The architectural brief outlined several key requirements. While imbuing the new venue with a unique identity, it had to respect the design of the Heritage-listed Queensland Cultural Centre by Robin Gibson AO, of which it would become a part.

It also sought to honour and acknowledge the site as a place of storytelling by Australia's First Nations peoples for millennia: *"QPAC's hope is that the venue might in and of itself honour and grow from an understanding of this deep cultural context."**

2019:

In May, local firm, **Blight Rayner Architecture** in partnership with **Snøhetta** were announced as the winners of the competition for the project.

In its transparency, the design contrasts markedly with the solid masses of the existing QPAC building but respects it in several ways: the stepped roofline, the alignment of the theatre with the QPAC façades, the precast concrete colour; the limited materials palette, and the functional integration with QPAC's back-of-house facilities.

Crucially for the State's performing arts centre, their design retained QPAC's two existing studios and created the option to add a flexible engagement, rehearsal and performance space twice the size of the stage under the auditorium of the new theatre.

In August, **Lendlease** were appointed as Managing Contractor.

2020:

Construction began, led by the **Department of Housing and Public Works**. In total, the build involved more than one million work hours, with 2,478 workers inducted on-site.

2025:

Following a month-long public naming consultation in which more than 5,000 people participated, **Glasshouse Theatre** was announced as the venue's official name on 21 July 2025.

2026:

In January, the construction of Glasshouse Theatre was completed, with the first shows to be staged in March.

A detailed timeline and other information is available at:



*Extract from New Performing Arts Venue – Design Brief

Download information about the Glasshouse Theatre.

PERFORMING ARTS IS FOR EVERYONE

The accessibility needs of all people are critical in the development of cultural infrastructure. We want everyone to experience the joy of the performing arts. Here are some of the ways the Glasshouse Theatre aims to make every visitor feel welcome.

DEDICATED SEATING OPTIONS

The Glasshouse, as with all QPAC theatres, have dedicated seating options for patrons using wheelchairs and their guests. There are flexible wheelchair positions within the theatre, enabling numerous options for viewing in all price points. There are also accessible seating options for those transferring to a theatre seat from a wheelchair or mobility aid, and wider seating options for guests who require additional space.

EQUITABLE ENTRY

The entry ramp offers a step-free entrance into the theatre, taking patrons directly past Brian Robinson's sculpture and, in the future, offering a glimpse of activity in the flexible performance space under the theatre.

Lifts are available throughout the Glasshouse. Two lifts connect the foyers while lifts onstage and backstage support the movement of cast and crew into and around the theatre.

CHANGING PLACES FACILITY

The Glasshouse features QPAC's first Changing Places facility. Located on Level 2, this accessible bathroom provides additional space and includes an adult-sized change table, ceiling hoist, peninsular toilet and privacy screen. A carers' room is also available on Level 2. Other accessible toilets are available on levels 2 and 4, with all-gender toilets also on Level 4.

HEARING AUGMENTATION

In the auditorium, hearing augmentation is provided via three separate systems: ListenFM system, the Auracast system and an integrated induction hearing loop system. These systems will offer hearing assistance for all performances and audio description for select performances, with patrons able to choose the system that best suits their needs.

HIDDEN DISABILITIES SUNFLOWER PROGRAM

To support and raise awareness of patrons with a non-visible disability, QPAC is a proud member of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower program. Wearing a Sunflower is voluntary. By choosing to wear a Hidden Disabilities Sunflower, you can signal to our trained staff that you may need assistance or a little extra time during your visit.

To purchase your Sunflower ahead of your visit to QPAC visit



Download information about the Glasshouse Theatre.



THE GLASS FAÇADE

The idea of the undulating glass façade emanated from a prose poem written by respected Elder and artist, Aunty Lilla Watson. It speaks of the ripples in the river and fish swimming in the water. The architects abstracted this theme by rippling the façade so that, viewed from outside, people would variously come into view or blur behind the curvature, in effect creating a sense of theatre.

Also suggesting the flowing lines of theatre curtains, the façade wraps around three sides of the venue. Its transparency amplifies the sense of welcome to visitors, along with flexible performance spaces below which, when opened in 2027, will be visible to passersby.

The architects Blight Rayner Architecture, in partnership with Snøhetta, describe the façade as a 'glass veil' which enables people to see through to the theatre behind it and how it aligns with the existing façades of the performing arts centre.

- Requiring highly-specialised engineering, the façade was developed by Seele, designers of the renowned 5th Avenue Apple retail store in New York.
- There are 217 individual panes of glass and each one is unique.
- In total, the façade is 14.28m high, spans 2,400m² and is hung from the roof.
- The largest pane weighs nearly 2.4 tonnes and measures 7.1m high by 2.2m wide.
- The specially-made insulated glass is made up of 4 separate panes and is 50mm thick. Its thermal properties are designed to boost the building's energy efficiency.
- On the western side of the building, a black inlay is embedded in the glass to provide privacy backstage to performers and, informed by sun motion studies, reduce the thermal impacts of the afternoon summer sun.
- During manufacture, the kiln in China had to be extended to accommodate the size of the panes.



Download information about the Glasshouse Theatre.

THE AUDITORIUM

*“The theatre venue is conceived as the warm heart of the new building, made of curved timber ribbons that express the energy flow between performer and viewer.”**

The Glasshouse is designed to ensure every patron feels intimately connected to the stage, wherever they are sat in the auditorium.

This approach was informed by the renowned UK theatre designer, Sir Cameron MacIntosh, who advised the Glasshouse Theatre’s architects to make it as intimate as possible. In response, the design was adjusted to bring the back wall of the auditorium 3m closer to the stage, wrapping the balcony around the sides of the venue to border the stage.

The sense of connection this creates is two-way – while the audience feel close to the stage, performers can see every patron clearly, even those in the back rows.

- The auditorium is designed on two levels: the stalls level has 1,000 seats and the balcony has 500 seats. This capacity is comparable to QPAC’s Concert Hall, yet the furthest seat in the Glasshouse Theatre is only 28m from the stage.
- A gradual elevation of seating in the stalls enhances sight lines to the stage for every audience member.
- Under each seat is an individual air conditioning vent. Known as displacement air conditioning, this energy-efficient floor-based cooling system displaces warmer air to create exceptional patron comfort and improved air quality.
- Over 3,000m² of carpet has been laid in the front of house, foyer and auditorium, with 1,200m² in the auditorium alone.
- The interior design symbolises Queensland’s rainforests. The carpet’s dark green colour was developed specifically for the project and mirrors the deep-green of the seat upholstery, while the curving timber ribbons are made of locally-sourced grey ironbark.

* From the Snøhetta website - The Glasshouse Theatre



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THE BACKSTAGE EXPERIENCE

The Glasshouse Theatre is intended to host the world's best performers and companies.

Backstage facilities have been designed to create an environment that supports casts and crews to deliver exceptional performances to Queensland audiences. Comfort, adaptability and privacy are key priorities in making these spaces a home-from-home for touring performers.

- There are 17 dressing rooms with up to 79 mirror spaces.
- Dressing rooms are located across levels 2 (stage level), 3 and 4. They range from single occupancy at the stage level to 22-person chorus dressing rooms on the upper levels.
- There are designated company and stage management rooms located in the crossover corridor behind the stage, purpose-designed for those team members' requirements.
- Main or headlining performers are typically offered the stage-level dressing rooms while ensemble performers as well as understudies, chorus members and swing performers make use of the larger shared facilities on the upper levels.
- All dressing rooms feature horizontal mirror lighting, departing from the traditional single mirrors bordered by lightbulbs. This innovation offers visiting companies flexibility to set up the dressing room spaces to suit their cast's needs.
- The glass façade that borders the dressing room corridors is embedded with a black inlay to ensure privacy for performers as they move between dressing rooms and stage.
- A private lift also allows direct access backstage from street level.



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TECHNICAL INNOVATIONS AUDIO

Delivering world-class audio experiences across a broad range of artforms requires a design packed with innovations that customise the space whatever the act. In the Glasshouse Theatre, here are some ways we ensure the sound you hear is exactly as the artist intended.

BOX IN A BOX DESIGN

The Glasshouse Theatre is formed of two boxes. A structural box on the outside supports the foyers while a theatre box on the inside houses the theatre space. The two boxes are kept separated via rubber mounts and insulation, enabling the theatre box to become an acoustically-isolated zone.

This means that, when the front of house doors are closed, the only sounds you'll hear are those created in the theatre.

DESIGNED TO SUPPORT ANY ACT

Retractable acoustic curtains, compound curves on the walls and ceiling, and the use of wood throughout the auditorium are just a few of the fundamental design features that support every performer to be heard in their fullest and clearest form.

Above the front of the stage, an acoustic reflector – known affectionately as the 'eyelash' or 'eyebrow' – can be maneuvered precisely to create optimal transmission of non-amplified sound from an orchestra in the pit to the audience.

The orchestra pit features full-surround absorptive panels, allowing for better sound control and protection for musicians, while a reduced overhang of the stage creates better sound travel and visibility of the orchestra.

For amplified performances, the sound experience is finely tuned via the state-of-the-art PA.



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TECHNICAL INNOVATIONS STAGING

Staging is about transformation – managing how the tangible aspects of the performance environment set and shift to create the world in which the performance exists. Here are some ways the Glasshouse Theatre offers new cutting-edge approaches to create real stage magic.

AUTOMATED DIGITAL FLY SYSTEM

A major innovation is the introduction of QPAC's first digital fly system. This offers exceptional control and precision for all flown elements of a show yet requires less crew labour than the traditional manually-operated counterweighted pulley systems.

Bars can move in and out at up to 1.8m per second (up to a max working load limit of 700kg) and stop very quickly. Pre-programming enables the seamless repetition of highly-complex maneuvers for show-after-show at the push of a button.

The fly system is controlled by operators positioned in the galleries above the side stages. Using consoles with joysticks, they can respond live to any variations in a performance, making adjustments to support safety and precision.

VERSATILE ORCHESTRA PIT

The Glasshouse Theatre's orchestra pit has been engineered for maximum flexibility. It has three floor sections that can be raised or lowered independently to accommodate orchestras of varying sizes. By removing up to five rows from the front of the stalls, this design enables four different pit configurations – most other spaces have only one or two.

Its design also enables musicians to perform in full view of the audience (such as for musicals) or below stage level for productions that prefer the orchestra unseen.



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TECHNICAL INNOVATIONS LIGHTING

LED EFFICIENCY

All lighting in the building, including in-built and theatre units, are LED colour-changing, significantly reducing power consumption and enabling more custom lighting options throughout.

Even the three powerful follow-spotlights, positioned in the dome room at the back of the auditorium and used to highlight key performers during a show, are fully LED.

INTELLIGENT LIGHTS

On stage, the whole overhead rig is filled with intelligent moving light fixtures. These can be programmed to move, change the colour or width of the lighting beam and can create patterns onstage via in-built gobo's.

This versatility reduces both the number of lights needed for a production as well as the time needed to prepare the lighting for a performance.

SEAMLESS INTEGRATION WITH DESIGN

The black spaces between the curved timber ribbons that wrap around the auditorium are where lights and other technical equipment can be tucked away, minimising disruption of the overall aesthetic of the space.



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MORE SHOWS MORE OFTEN!

Reducing downtime – the time between productions – is a key focus at QPAC. To minimise gaps, innovations are needed at every step from bump in to bump out. Here's how the Glasshouse Theatre takes QPAC's legendary turnaround speed to the next level.

DOCK TO STAGE

Reducing difficulties in the journey of set and technical equipment from truck to stage is vital for a quick turnaround. In the Glasshouse Theatre, the wide prompt side wing connects directly onto the Scenery Dock.

From this beating heart of the building, the path from truck to stage is on one level, enabling scenery and equipment to be moved straight to stage via the large Scenery Dock door.

AUTOMATED SYSTEMS

The automation of the fly system and orchestra pit means faster transitions on stage and in the auditorium.

Whether it's changing the configuration or elevation of the orchestra pit, or loading and unloading equipment and scenery from the fly bars, the automation of these systems means fewer time-consuming and labour-intensive processes are required in the Glasshouse Theatre, leading to significant time savings.

GOODS LIFT

The unsung innovation of the space – the goods lift in the prompt side wing – connects the basement to the fly tower via a series of galleries. In other venues, moving large items requires either the use of a winch, flying it on the bars or dismantling the object and carrying it up in pieces, all of which take extra time and labour.



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BEYOND QPAC DIGITAL BROADCASTS

The Glasshouse Theatre is home to a new in-house digital broadcast suite, putting QPAC at the cutting edge of recording and live broadcast.

This facility will support QPAC to reach audiences far beyond its walls, making world-class performance accessible to patrons who may not be able to attend a performance in-person. This offering includes livestreamed productions, bringing our stages to people's homes or screens in local theatres as the show happens.

QPAC's existing broadcast suite has offered recording and livestreaming of productions through an in-house set up and dedicated team since 2019.

This has enabled extraordinary performances, such as Ballet Preljocaj's *Swan Lake* (2025) and the Queensland Symphony Orchestra's final concert with conductor Alondra de la Parra (2019), to reach audiences wherever they are. The latter attracted 12,000 live viewers, enough to fill more than seven Concert Halls!

This new facility, based backstage of the Glasshouse Theatre, will elevate what QPAC can offer, including livestreaming productions in 4K HDR and Dolby Atmos sound quality.



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STILL TO COME FLEXIBLE PERFORMANCE SPACE

The design of the Glasshouse Theatre proposed a future option to construct flexible engagement, rehearsal and performance space under the auditorium of the new theatre.

The construction of this space was not within the scope of the original project and was proposed as a separate project to be delivered once the Glasshouse Theatre was completed.

The 2023-24 State Budget committed \$14.6 million over two years to deliver these spaces, with QPAC contributing a further \$7 million. Construction works on this project are due to commence in 2026 with estimated completion during 2027.

When complete, this will create QPAC's most versatile space, capable of hosting rehearsals, performances and functions.

Featuring a space equivalent in size to two Lyric Theatre stages, major productions and touring musicals will be able to develop or rehearse work here on an appropriately-sized footprint. It can also be divided into two studios for smaller rehearsals and creative developments.

The space will also be able to operate as a fully self-contained black box theatre with a capacity for 400 patrons utilising both retractable and flat floor seating. It will have a dedicated foyer space and bar.

Once complete, this new space will be a fantastic resource for Queensland artists and arts companies, supporting the creation of new work and sharing of more Queensland stories at a variety of scales.



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OTHER STAGING FACTS

- The stage floor is a fully removable and customisable timber floor with a trap room beneath. This enables scenery to seamlessly move through, and performers to appear and disappear!
- At the front of the stage, the opening of the proscenium arch is 9m high x 15m wide, to accommodate the intricate sets that often come with major international productions.
- Above the stage, the fly tower's grid is 24.5m high, over 2.5 times the height of the proscenium. This allows sets to 'fly' up and disappear out of the audience's view. It contains 100 fly bars, the same number as in the Lyric Theatre, with a further 8 bars front of house.
- Behind the scenes, nearly 70km of cabling supports the venue's sophisticated equipment, including its control systems, power and communications.



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