

LEICESTER'S CURVE THEATRE

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Leicester needed its new performing arts centre and theatre to become a landmark symbolising the city's renaissance and reflecting its position as a centre for cultural industries in the Midlands. The 13,000 square metre performing arts centre, with its fully-glazed transparent façade, houses two auditoria and a stage that can be revealed to the street outside. One auditorium has 750 fixed seats whilst the second has an open floor space for 350. These face each other sharing one large stage which, with the help of acoustic curtains, can be divided, adapted or united into any number of configurations. Named 'The Curve' it is a fantastic, flexible space equipped with all the very latest technology, bringing theatre-goers a diverse programme of plays, performances and spectacles throughout the season. Architect Rafael Viñoly's striking design does away with the traditional barriers between performers and audience and front and back of house, opening up the auditoria to make them part of the whole experience of being at The Curve.

The same principle holds true in the café-bar areas, which number two eateries and five bars serving up to a thousand show-goers at once. They are deliberately designed to draw people in from the outside and provide a vantage point for experiencing the day-to-day life of a producing theatre.

Flexibility, speed and best use of the space available were all vital to the smooth-running of the food and beverage operation. This literally extends to all floors of the curve shaped building, requiring a suite of production and hospitality kitchens and bars capable of serving hot food and drink throughout the day plus the perfect G&T in the limited interval drinks window.

Hepburn Associates specified bar and catering equipment for all the catering areas in the theatre, building in some clever space-saving devices. They also chose hard-working back bar equipment including six machines capable of washing and drying 25 glasses in just two minutes, for each of the static and mobile bars. Each glasswash area has two glasswashers so the team can load one while the other is in use, thereby helping to ensure a plentiful supply of crystal clean glasses when the interval bell rings.

Hepburn Associates worked in liaison with Leicester City Council's project managers, Focus Consultants and Segue, to ensure that the fit-out of catering areas met all their agreed specifications in time for the official theatre opening. The main £51 million contract was awarded to Bovis Lend Lease and took 3 years to complete within a very tight city centre site.

Hepburn Associates tendered the supply and installation of the catering areas separately on behalf of Leicester City Council and equipment supply was then novated to Bovis to ascertain programming timeframes were met. Hepburn's ascertained that the specifications were met throughout the project and post-installation. Keith Butler from Focus commented "Hepburn Associates have designed the catering areas within every project I have been involved in during the last six years – they are a great outfit!"



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