Wexford Opera House, County Wexford, Ireland

Stirling Prize Shortlist: Penultimate Round
“Ireland has had to wait a long time for its first proper opera house, but patience has been rewarded: the beautiful building now shoehorned into Wexford’s tight little streets is an architectural triumph... the acoustic and sight lines are well neigh perfect.”

The Independent : Michael Church, 21st October 2008

“Pass through the same modest back-street entrance and you emerge into a shiny state-of-the-art Opera House, a 780-seater mini Glyndebourne, its elegant horseshoe swathed in sleek American walnut, All for a mere 33 million Euro (£27m) with crystal clear acoustic, spacious stage, comfortable seats, good sight-lines throughout the house, and local”

The Observer : Anthony Holden, 26th October 2008

“The auditorium is a fantastic achievement. There are some cosmetic similarities to Hopkins’ Glyndebourne but I find Wexford much more satisfying. At Glyndebourne the auditorium constantly reminds you that it is a kit of parts, but Wexford is a taut and modelled skin of timber, which distorts and shifts, but is always whole. The steeper lines of the balconies, ending beautifully as they turn toward the stage, are fabulous from every angle especially the stage.”

Architects Journal : Kieran Long 16th October 2008

“What has been achieved is remarkable”

Architecture Ireland : Liam Tuite October 2008

“the building has also been highly commended by audiences, artists and critics for its excellent acoustic, superb staging and production facilities, and its very relaxing and comfortable ambience”.

“We continue to be impressed by the vision, ingenuity and creativity which Keith Williams Architects brought to the design and construction of Wexford Opera House”.

David McLoughlin : Chief Executive, Wexford Festival Opera
Wexford Opera Festival is as important culturally to Ireland as the Glyndebourne Festival is to England, consequently the building of the new 7,235sqm Festival Opera House by Keith Williams Architects and the Irish Government’s (Office of Public Works architects department) was Ireland’s most important arts project for many years. The new opera house has been constructed in the heart of the medieval maritime town, on the site of the Festival’s former theatre. It contains the new main opera house (780 seats) completely lined in North American black walnut, full flytower and backstage and a transformable second space of 175 seats, together with rehearsal, production facilities, bars, café and foyer spaces.

Close up, the new building has retained the extraordinary element of surprise and secrecy so characteristic of the old Theatre Royal, by re-integrating itself into the historic fabric of Wexford’s medieval centre, behind reinstated terraced buildings. The scale of the building and its contribution to Wexford’s silhouette only becomes truly apparent when the project is viewed from the banks of the River Slaney. From there the new flytower appears in the skyline alongside the spires of Wexford’s two Pugin inspired churches and the Italianate tower of the Franciscan Friary, announcing the presence of an exceptional new cultural building in the historic townscape.

Internally the main auditorium, inspired both by the form of a cello and the curves of a traditional horseshoe-form operatic space, has been lined in black American walnut whilst the seating has been finished in pale purple leather giving a rich sense of material quality to its contemporary design.

Though primarily conceived for the autumn opera festival, the new building is intended to operate as a year round arts venue, for both additional Wexford Festival productions and visiting companies.

The award winning building was officially opened by Mr Brian Cowen TD An Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) on 5 September 2008, whilst the first opera took place in the new house on 16 October 2008 with a performance of Rimsky-Korsakoff’s Snegourchka (the Snow Maiden).
acoustic diffusers split into 4 'sleds' suspended from soffit. Gaps between sleds kept clear for suspension wires.

365x127x39 steel beam to support winch mechanism for stage suspensions.

Precast concrete panels sitting between steel 'I' section flanges to provide heavy acoustic separation to proof void over 'I' section as bottom chord for roof trusses over stiff angle frame to support diffuser.

75x20 steel flat as mid span hanger.

30mm thick plywood decking fixes at 300 centers to steel subframe as acoustic plate to reflect sound back to performers on stage. Oversize steel-work provides an element of diffusion.

Steel forestage grid 203x90x26 PFC channel flange with open grillage of 75x38 RSC channels to form floor.

Pulley blocks proscenium wall dotted for clarity.

190 diameter C.H.S as hanger for grid suspensions from truss over pulley wheels mounted on steel plates welded back to steel to guide suspension wires between each 'sled'.

Aluminum wrapped solid MDF slats as visual screen to technical areas. Gaps keep acoustic transparency.

**KEY:**

1. Entrance
2. Reception/Box Office
3. Foyer
4. Bar
5. Main Auditorium
6. Second Stage
7. Senior Piccolo
8. Administration Office
9. Barley
10. Dressing Room
11. Vest
12. Corporate Reception
13. Classroom and
14. rehearsal Room
15. Board Room
**Facts & Figures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Wexford Opera House</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>Wexford Festival Opera &amp; OPW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme</td>
<td>2005 - 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>7,235 sqm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>€33 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Axonometric of forestage grid
Awards

2010
AIA Excellence in Architecture
Civic Trust Award for Outstanding Contribution

2009
RIAI Cultural Building of the Year
RIBA Awards 2009
Irish Times Special Jury Award

2008
OPUS Awards

Award Winner
Award Winner
Award Winner
Award Winner
Award Winner