

Renaissance Architecture

“Buildings are everywhere,” writes Alexandra Lange, “large and small, ugly and beautiful, ambitious and dumb. We walk among them and live inside them but are largely passive dwellers in cities or towers, houses, open spaces, and shops we had no hand in creating.” Buildings are discussed — indeed aspects of them obsessed upon.... To the layman, then, architecture is conveyed as little more than something that costs a lot and causes a lot of grief, rather than something with the potential to enhance our daily lives.

Excerpt From “Why Don’t We Read About Architecture,” New York Times, Allison Arieff, Mar. 2012

Architecture clearly reflects the values of a culture, as described in the excerpt from “Why Don’t We Read About Architecture”. The architecture during the Renaissance shows an emphasis on the cultural values, preserving traditional construction, and extending to new materials. The Globe Theater, where Shakespeare’s plays were performed, is an example of tudor architectural style, a prominent feature of Renaissance Architecture. The Tudor-Style design of the Globe Theater are a composite of an exposed wooden superstructure matrix filled with a stucco constituent. This structure, built in 1599, is amongst the most influential and well known Elizabethan Playhouses.

In 1597, the lease for Shakespeare’s original theater, ‘The Theatre’, expired. Shakespeare was forced to build a new playhouse, as attempting to enter into a new lease would not be feasible. This prompted Shakespeare to build, and, in part, design a new venue for his productions at a site on the south bank of the Thames in Southwark, London. (Theaters needed to be built outside of the London City Limits since theaters were viewed as “unfavorable to society”. In theaters, gambling and even beer /baiting occurred.) By 1599, the Globe Theater was already producing plays with much success

The design of the new Globe Theater was highly reflective of its purpose - entertainment. The theater's three balconies provide a view onto the stage, and seating for 1500. However, one aspect of the Globe Theater's design was overlooked. In June 1613, 14 years after the theater opened, a cannon misfired and sparks entered the thatched roof of the theater. The theater, like many Renaissance structures was made of wood. A mass egress from the theater was nearly impossible because the theater was believed to have two doors, one main entrance and one auxiliary exit door. Yet, miraculously, not one person was reported injured or dead from this ravaging fire.

Shakespeare's Globe Theater was promptly rebuilt. In 1616, the "Globe Theater 2" opened for business. After all, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages." (Act II, Scene VII, *As You Like It*) Theaters, like the Globe of the Renaissance, undergo a life cycle. From the birth of a theater, to its death (by fire, bankruptcy, etc.) any theater has the potential to reinvent the way the public views theater and the performances held inside.

Shakespeare masterfully realized the potential of theater. His intricate texts alone have been in print since their publication, but there is a different message conveyed when one watches the play as it was meant to be. By viewing Shakespeare's plays in a theater environment, like the Globe Theater, those in attendance at live performances in the theater achieved a deeper understanding of the text. "All at once, theater was an institution, a property, a corporation. For the first time in more than a thousand years it had the sort of reality that meant most to Renaissance society: it was *real*... - an established and visible part of society." (Orgel, *The Illusion of Power*, Introduction) Theaters essentially became a critical factor in the development of the Renaissance culture as theaters not only created the dramas performed, but created a lasting effect on the audiences as well.

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