

# Three: BROAD STAGE

## Santa Monica, California

Renzo Zecchetto creates a performing arts center that captures the laid-back vibe of Southern California.

By Clifford A. Pearson

**Architect:** Renzo Zecchetto Architects—Renzo Zecchetto, principal; Michael Stebbins, project manager; Lari Hashimoto, Danielle Yafuso, assistant project managers; Taylor Hsiao, Daryl Maguire, Minya Radenkovich, Keri Morton, Mathew Nelson, Sara Loe, Larry Biggs, Richard Song, project team

**Engineers:** Nabih Youssef & Associates (structural); Mazzetti & Associates (m/e/p); KPF Consulting Engineers (civil)

**Consultants:** Jaffe Holden Acoustics (acoustics); Newson Brown Acoustics (sound isolation); Fisher Dachs Associates (theatrical)

**General contractor:** FTR International

**Size:** 32,000 square feet

**Cost:** \$34 million

**Completion date:** September 2008

### SOURCES

**Basaltina stone cladding:**

IMT Italian Marble & Tile

**Curtain wall:** W&W Glass

**Steel windows:** Hope's Windows

**Skylights:** O'Keeffe's

**Acoustical ceiling:** BASWA Acoustic

**Suspension grid:** USG

**Window coverings:** MechoShade

**Downlights:** ERCO; Rambusch;

Indy Lighting

**Exterior lights:** ERCO; Simes;

Poulsen; Lumux

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For westside residents in Los Angeles, the Eli and Edythe Broad Stage in Santa Monica offers a welcome alternative to fighting traffic en route to a downtown theater. Owned by Santa Monica College but serving both school and community audiences, the theater complex juggles a range of tasks. On one level, it provides remarkably sophisticated theater-arts facilities for a community college. On another, it stands as a symbol of a blossoming cultural scene in Santa Monica (and the "growing Balkanization of the L.A. area" due to traffic congestion, as Christopher Hawthorne noted in the *Los Angeles Times* on October 11). "Santa Monica is a beach town," states Dale Franzen, director of the Broad Stage. "We're not a black-tie kind of place." But with movie stars, famous artists, and big-time developers living in the area, it's not Podunk either.

### Program

Funded by private donations and bond measures passed by the cities of Santa Monica and Malibu, the project cost \$34 million to build and serves many masters. It comprises the new 499-seat Broad Stage, a black-box theater in a renovated building next door, and a variety of rehearsal, teaching, and support spaces in the old and new structures. The main theater had to accommodate a range of performances – from opera and music to dance and drama. With Franzen, a former opera singer, as its director and actor Dustin



The theater's south elevation faces busy Santa Monica Boulevard.

Hoffman as its board chairman, everyone expected the Broad Stage to provide excellent acoustics and a great place to watch theater.

### Solution

"We started with the idea of an acoustically superb space," states Renzo Zecchetto, who established his firm in Santa Monica in 1990 after working with Charles Moore for 10 years. "From the beginning, we designed from the inside out," he adds. With Italy's "horseshoe" opera houses in mind, Zecchetto kept the dimensions of the theater fairly intimate (74 feet long and 72 feet wide) and tucked boxes at either end to bring audiences close to the performers. But he gave the theater a grand stage – 94 feet wide and 36 feet deep with a proscenium opening 47 feet wide and 24 feet high – to accommodate large productions.

Collaborating with Jaffe Holden

Acoustics, Zecchetto developed a system of convex surfaces – some finished with CNC-milled mahogany panels and others with plaster – that combine early and secondary sound reflections and soften the acoustics. Zecchetto likens the plaster-coated sections curving above the seats to a peeled orange, while the mahogany forms at either end of the balcony recall the hulls of a ship. Motorized drapes hanging from the ceiling adjust acoustics to handle different types of performances.

Reducing noise was as important as creating a rich sound. So the designers brought air in from below the seats, instead of using noisy equipment to force it down from above. They also pulled mechanical equipment out of the hall, housing it in a set of white boxes expressed on the exterior of the building.

To get double use of the impressive fly tower with its 37