

Deck the Hall

Sydney Town Hall's lower hall is refurb'ed and ready for action.

Text & Images:/ Tim Stackpool

In the grand tradition of the Lower Town Hall as a centre of civic life throughout the former British Empire, Sydney's historical Peace Hall stands ready again, fully refurbished, to host 21st century-standard exhibitions, flower shows, craft fairs, polling booths, charity bazaars, Mayoral receptions, rug and CD going-out-of-business sales, dance classes, product and policy launches and gumtree-waving naturalisation ceremonies.

It's TAKEN 23 MONTHS and almost \$40m, but the refit and refurbishment of Sydney Town Hall's lower hall is now complete. It has turned the city's most recent heritage-listed building into not only one of the 'greenest' civic buildings in the metro area, but also the two halls located within the complex now form one of the most advanced and versatile performance and display spaces you could hope for. In a massive undertaking, the floor of the lower hall, sometimes referred to as the Peace Hall, was completely removed, while significant excavation was also undertaken on the lower ground levels. While the heritage restrictions might have made some AV consultants run for cover, the challenge was all in a day's work for David Becker's team at Point of View (POV), audiovisual systems designer Robert Joseph,

and Paul Cavallaro from TCP.

"You have to tread very lightly," Joseph told AV. "For us it's always about a very, very close communication with the rest of the design team to make sure it all sits comfortably within the rest of the space, and becomes almost transparent." POV designs are famous for being as beautiful as they are practical. With projects that stretch from Sydney to the Middle East and back again, POV drew on its experience with projects as diverse as lighting designs for bars and restaurants, to theatrical and conference venues in order to create a space that is both versatile and fit for purpose.

IN THE LOOP

The systems installation integration was undertaken by TCP, under the management of

Paul Cavallaro. TCP was responsible for the installation of the audio, intelligent lighting and digital signage infrastructure throughout the site. The project took 10 months from initial tender to walk out, with the only challenges those expected from such a building.

"Everything was fairly clear cut from the consultant's design," Cavallaro said. "There were changes made to the design of the hearing augmentation to adhere to the heritage building's site constraints. As the AV contract was awarded well after the builder was in full swing [surprise, surprise – Ed.], it made the Ampetronic hearing augmentation install extremely challenging. After numerous site meetings and design changes the loop design was implemented." Additionally, Cavallaro especially acknowledges the assistance given by





The Peace Hall refurbishment project is a shining example of upgrading a heritage building to meet contemporary expectations of presentation standards without unduly compromising either the operational requirements of the building or its historical aesthetic. Lighting, sound, communications, HVAC, power distribution and audiovisual facilities are far from invisible, but nevertheless don't overwhelm the character of the building.

Thomas Kelly from Hills SVL, tirelessly working to meet the requirements of the hearing loop.

In terms of connectivity, TCP designed and installed detailed custom rack panels and field plates to accommodate a wide range of functionality. The distributed sound system provides excellent coverage and frequency response across the space, while preserving the aesthetics of the hall, resulting in high-performance, intelligible sound regardless of where you are in the room. Level can be controlled using simple and intuitive aluminium brushed keypads, which allow easy selection of the source (or sources) as well as volume control for each area. TCP System Engineer John Wong undertook extensive design and planning for all custom rack and field panels, cables schedules and schematic drawings. Meanwhile, TCP's Commissioning Engineer Ging Tallada spent hours taking care of the end-to-end testing. Martin Thorpe, TCP's Audio Engineer, undertook the EASE modelling and digital signal processing and implementation.

AWFULLY VERSATILE

Sydney Town Hall attracts a wide variety of clients – from major corporates to school recitals. As such, POV's design had to consider making the space useable, regardless of the type of client, or the level of production. "In a venue such as this, the stage can be anywhere," Robert Joseph observed. "Not only that, but it can change – not just from day to day, but from lunchtime through to dinner." As such, POV created an emphasis on AV infrastructure rather than on particular gear.

"For example, we could have installed theatre lights, but theatre lights come and go – there's a whole lot of LED lights coming out on the market, and they weren't around two or three years ago – so if we'd done the job three years ago our spec would be largely redundant by now. Rather, our job is to assist clients to easily bring all those things into the venue. And as the market learns about the space, it'll decide it that handle can certain tasks – we like to hear: 'oh the Town Hall's really flexible, it can do this and that and the other, much more than I expected it could'. After all, this isn't a boardroom or a meeting room with a very specific purpose, where you can build-in very specific technology."

For this reason, POV's perspective resulted in an 'open' design with matching 'open' architecture. POV designed a space where the stage can be set wherever the user desires, and microphones can be plugged in wherever required and operated from anywhere in the room. A full DMX infrastructure complements the FOH hardware.

"There is AMX control," reports Joseph, then adds: "but because it's a performance venue, we have to assume there's someone there to assist in setting and configuring the room – like a convention or banqueting space and less like a boardroom where anyone can come in and switch it on. And the users range from very serious corporates for a product launch or sales seminar, through to party applications where you might want to have people up dancing. The requirements will be very different. So what we try to do is develop an infrastructure that supports all those types of requirements, given

that there's inevitably going to be some level of setup. When you walk into the room it's just blank – there's just a blank floor, there's nothing there."

IN FOR THE LONG HALL

Consideration was given to the notion that the City of Sydney expects to maintain the current installation for a minimum of 10 years with a likelihood of extending beyond that. For POV, it was a case of trying to envisage what future requirements might develop. "We look at these venues as theatre spaces, where a theatre is really some type of black box until somebody comes along and turns it into some magic wonderland," Joseph told AV. "In this particular project, because it's a timber floor and everything's exposed, I'm really proud of how we integrated in with the heritage aspect of the building and how the cabling is all but invisible – we took a considerable amount of time working very carefully to ensure all that stuff was hidden but available to anyone."

Melissa Bajugi, the venue's Manager agrees: "Sydney Town Hall is once again a world class performing arts venue with state-of-the-art facilities for the comfort and enjoyment of patrons and visitors."

In fact, the Sydney Town Hall is now a grand, technologically-savvy venue that has the versatility required of the city's eclectic event producers. This is due to a well-considered infrastructure design and implementation that ultimately recognised and took advantage of the heritage value of the space rather than seeing it as a hindrance. ↵



JUST THE FACTS

Level 1, Peace Hall

- 20 x JBL Control 25AV speaker
- 3 x Australia Monitor SY-800V 375W RMS (100V) amplifier
- 14 x Custom lighting bars (TCP)
- 1 x Ampetronic ILD1000G Audio Induction Loop Driver
- 1 x Ampetronic SP5 Phase Shifter & Metal Loss Corrector
- Custom Control, DMX and Audio wall plates

Level 1, Foyer & New Lobby

- 7 x Tannoy CMS501 ceiling speaker
- 4 x JBL Control 25AV speaker
- 2 x Australia Monitor SY-800V 375W RMS (100V) amplifier
- 1 x NEC LCD3215 Multisync 32-inch LCD panel
- 2 x NEC LCD4215 Multisync 42-inch LCD panel
- 3 x Magenta MV500A twisted-pair receivers
- 1 x Biamp volume control wall plate
- Quantum Sphere brackets

Peace Hall, Equipment Room

- Jands rack frames and cable support trays
- 3 x Jands power rails
- 1 x Biamp Nexia SP speaker processor
- 1 x Biamp Nexia CS digital signal processor
- Custom audio patch panels

Digital Signage Control System

- 3 x Pioneer Computers DreamVision Mini PC (as media players)
- PADS Digital signage manager/server/designer software