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**Riverfront Park & Ascend Amphitheater
Nashville, Tenn.
Hodgetts + Fung with Hawkins Partners and Smith Gee Studio**



TEXT BY NATE BERG
PHOTOS BY MATTHEW CARBONE



For more than 30 years a thermal energy plant sat just blocks from the heart of downtown Nashville, Tenn., on the Cumberland River, burning garbage. When the plant closed in 2004, city leaders wanted to give the 11-acre site a flashy new life. Various projects were proposed, including an office complex and a baseball stadium, but nothing garnered local support. In 2007, the city decided to turn the riverfront land into a park.

Nashville being the home of country music, it wasn't long before the park's plan was amended to include one additional amenity: an amphitheater. But the city's then-mayor Karl Dean wanted to ensure the amphitheater didn't detract from the park, according to Hunter Gee, AIA, principal at local firm Smith Gee Studio, the project's architect of record. "From very early on there was almost a mandate that we reduce the visual impact on the city skyline," says Gee. That was interpreted to mean punching a hole through the building to allow continuous views of downtown.

Having never built an amphitheater, Smith Gee Studio hired Hodgetts + Fung, known for its work renovating the Hollywood Bowl near its office in Los Angeles. "It's very unusual for an amphitheater not to have a solid back to it," says Craig Hodgetts, FAIA.

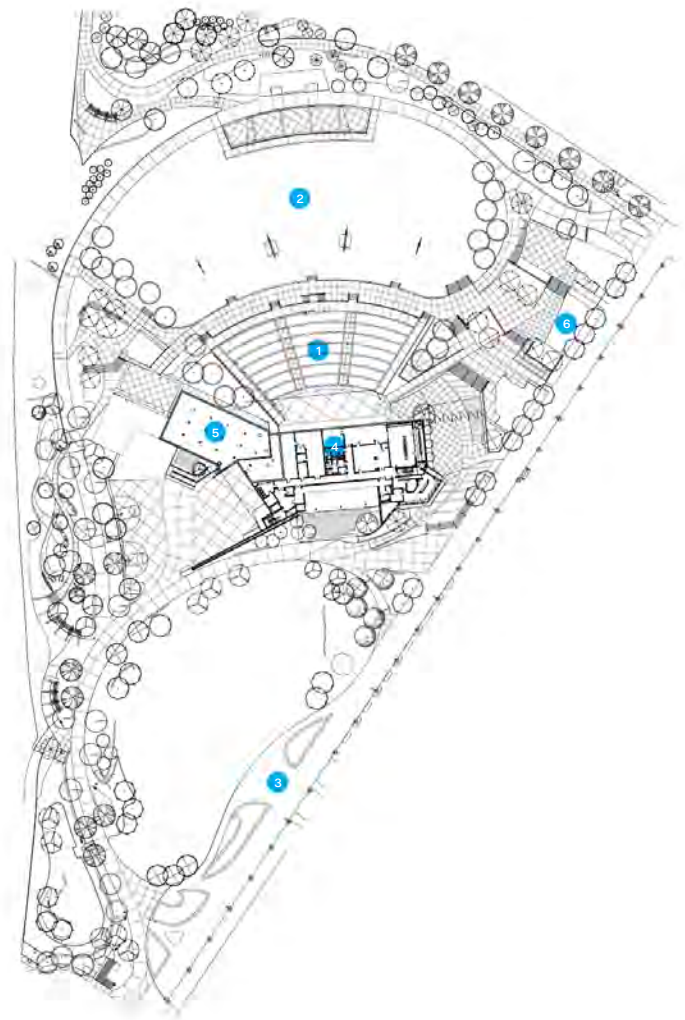
Inspired by Nashville's plentiful 19th-century limestone buildings but also by its country music heritage, Hodgetts + Fung's design uses the stone for the stage's base and draws inspiration for the structure from the curving lines of 1960s-era Gretsch amplifiers.

"It's a stripped down but elegant machine," Hodgetts says. "Nothing is forced. There's a pragmatic reason for just about everything that you see."

To the audience, the roof structure appears to rise out of the stone plinth at the front left of the stage, its metal trusses and screening climbing up then leaning sharply to the right, as if to point to the Cumberland River just across the train tracks. The stage itself is a big open room, with catwalks and rigging built into the walls and roof, along with integrated acoustical material. Beneath the stage, a large event space looks back toward the city, and catering facilities and a dining hall can accommodate 250. Outbuildings on the site are in the same family of forms.

Per the mayoral mandate, the amphitheater and its grassy seating for 7,000 blend into the park surroundings, with interlaced walking and cycling paths connecting to the riverfront. "This isn't just about there being a world-class amphitheater," says Kim Hawkins, principal of Nashville-based landscape architecture firm Hawkins Partners, which created the West Riverfront Master Plan to guide the site's redevelopment. "It's about there being a park within which an amphitheater sits."

Site Plan



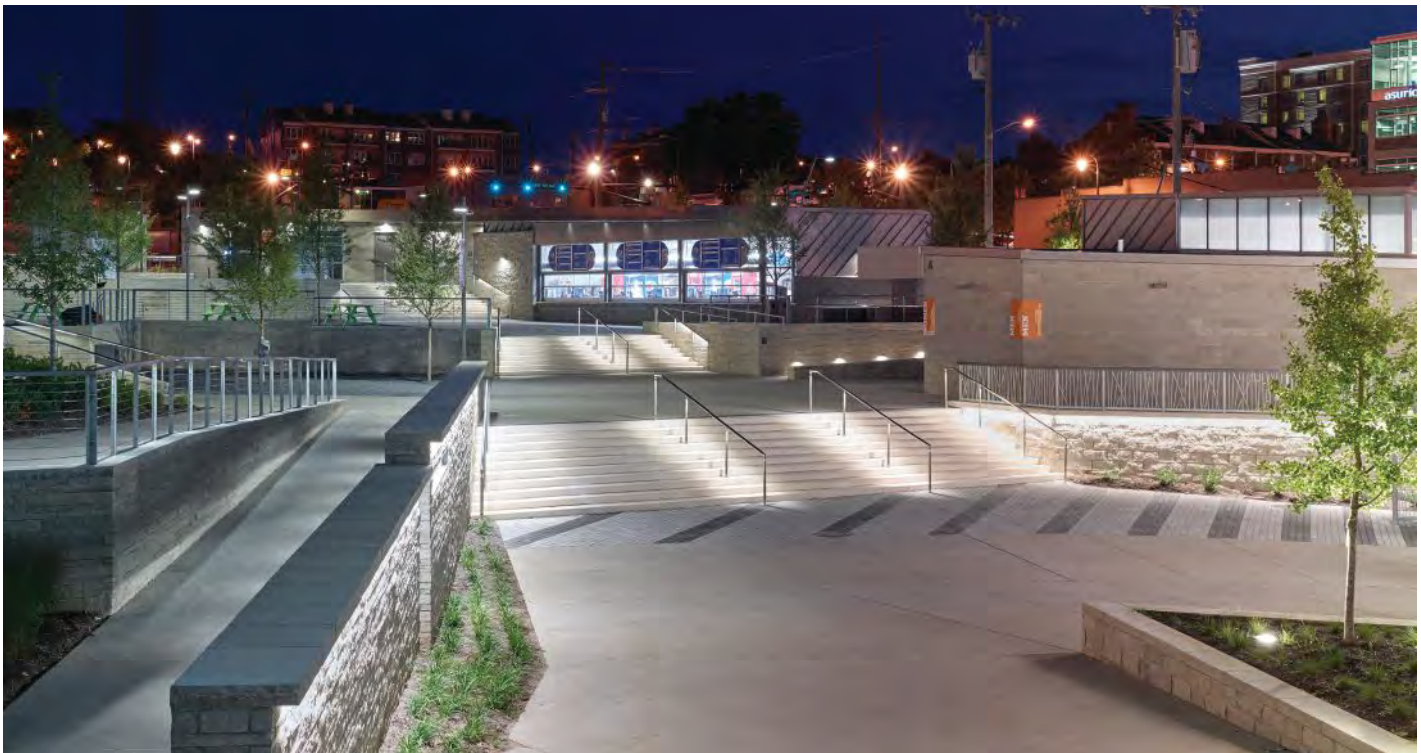
1. Seating
2. Lawn
3. Pedestrian and bicycle paths
4. Stage enclosure
5. Rainwater harvesting
6. Concessions



Previous Spread: Ascend Amphitheater anchors 11-acre Riverfront Park along Cumberland River

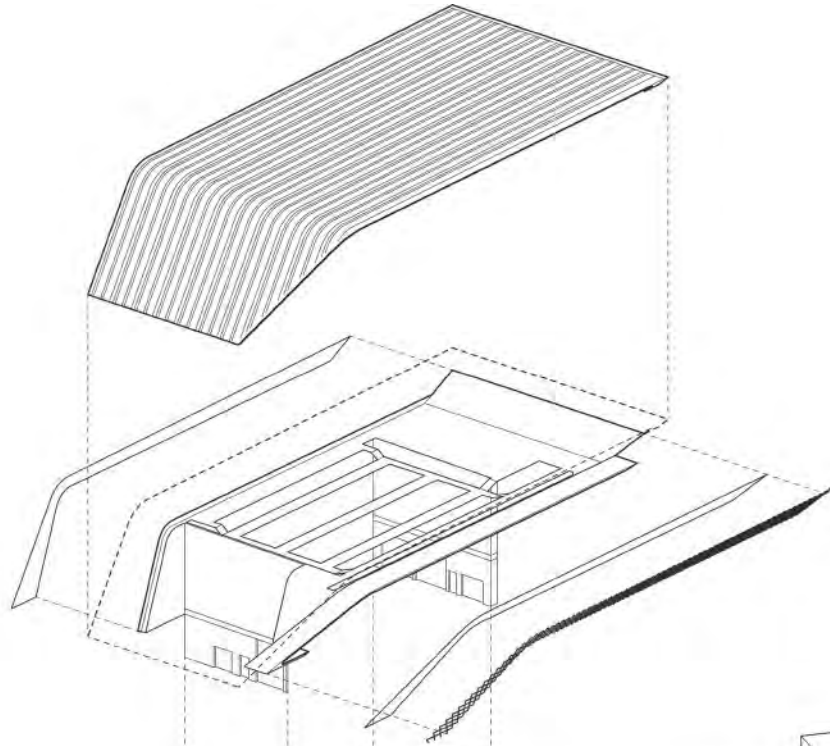
This Page: View west toward stage along limestone plinth



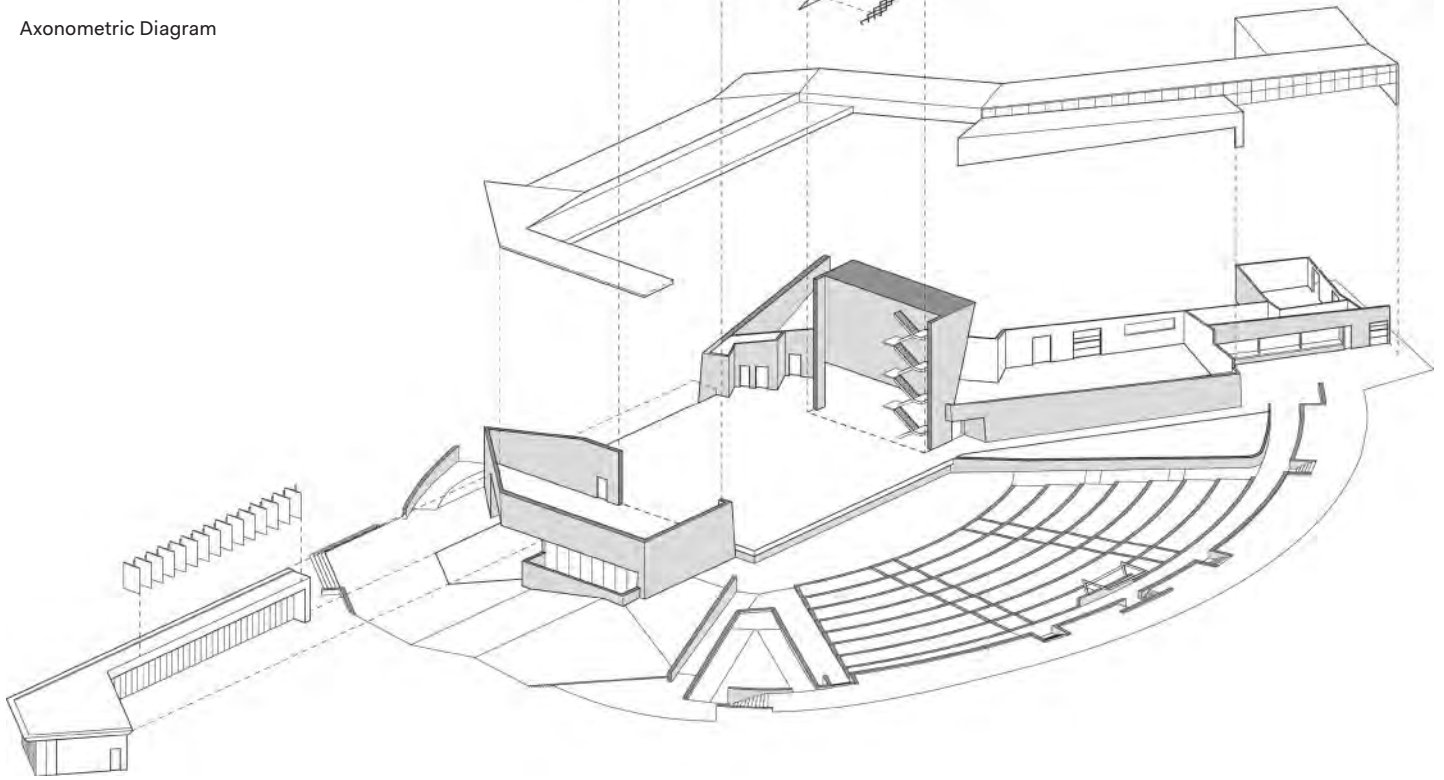


Opposite, Top: View north from
riverside pedestrian and bicycle path

Opposite, Bottom: View south from
stage toward concessions



Axonomic Diagram





Above: Riverfront Room and patio

Opposite: View east toward rear of amphitheater from Riverfront Park

Project Credits

Project: Riverfront Park & Ascend Amphitheater

Client: Metro Nashville Davidson County

Design Architect: Hodgetts + Fung, Los Angeles · Craig Hodgetts, FAIA, Hsinming Fung, AIA (principals-in-charge); Darin Vieira (associate senior designer)

Lead Consultant and Landscape Architect: Hawkins Partners, Nashville, Tenn. · Kim Hawkins (principal-in-charge); Brian Phelps (project designer); Nathan Oliver

Architect of Record and Interior Architect: Smith Gee Studio, Nashville, Tenn. · Hunter Gee, AIA (principal-in-charge); Andy Berry, AIA (project architect); Kara Babin Gee, Assoc. AIA (interiors lead); Omar Bakeer,

Kyle Keaffaber, Leah Robison, Reinalisa Santoyo

Lighting Consultant: Domingo Gonzalez Associates

Theater Planners: Schuler Shook

Acoustics: Jaffe Holden

Structural Engineer: EMC Structural Engineers

MEP Engineers: IC Thomasson Associates

Civil Engineer: Civil Site Design Group

Geotechnical Consultant: KS Ware & Associates

Construction Manager: Skanska

Environmental Graphics: TollesonMcCoy

Size: 40,000 square feet

Cost: \$40 million



Ascend
AMPHITHEATER

RIVERFRONT PARK