

ARM appointed to redesign SOH Concert Hall

News | Words [Linda Cheng](#)

The Sydney Opera House has appointed ARM Architecture to redesign its largest performance space, the concert hall. ARM made the announcement via its [website](#).

The concert hall upgrade is part of a 10-year renewal plan for the Opera House that began in 2013 on its 40th anniversary, in the lead up to its golden jubilee in 2023.

ARM, along with American theatre designers Schuler Shook and German acoustic engineers Müller BBM, won the competitive tender for the conceptual and schematic design of the Concert Hall upgrade.



The existing Sydney Opera House Concert Hall, to be redesigned by ARM Architecture. Image: Sydney Opera House

The World Heritage-listed Sydney Opera House, designed by Pritzker Prize Laureate Jørn Utzon and opened in 1973, was intended to have a 2,000-seat capacity in its main hall, which later became the Concert Hall after Utzon famously resigned from the project in 1966. Today, the concert hall has a capacity of 2,679, an increase that the original acoustic advisor, Lothar Cremer, said would be disastrous.

But the additional seats is not the only problem contributing to the poor acoustics of the hall – an issue likely to dominate its refurbishment. Architect Ken Woolley’s book *Reviewing the Performance* (Watermark Press, 2010) found a range of aspects including the volume of the space, as well as the seating arrangement, made it very difficult to achieve the acoustic requirements set out in the original brief.

Nonetheless, it’s widely known that the Concert Hall’s acoustics are under par. An acoustics benchmarking report conducted by Nagata Acoustics of Japan in 2003 found the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall ranked low among the 11 international world class venues. [The Economist](#) reported a confidential government report, which cited the same study, found that if the Opera House’s interior is not upgraded to meet 21st century standards, “the building will inevitably decline further to a point where it may cease to be functional.”

In 2011, a [Limelight](#) magazine survey of 200 performers and critics found the Concert Hall ranked 18th among 20 classical music venues around Australia.

The same survey ranked Perth Concert Hall, designed by Howlett and Bailey Architects (1973), a top performer with Melbourne Recital Centre designed by ARM (and winner of the 2009 Victorian Architecture Medal) coming in at second place.

ARM has also designed a number of performing arts venues across Australia including the redevelopment of Hamer Hall in Melbourne and the Perth Arena. The refurbishment of the Concert Hall will be ARM’s first project in Sydney.

The New South Wales Government has reserved \$202 million towards the Opera House’s stage 1 renewal projects which also include a new creative learning centre and upgrades to the box office, entry foyers and vehicle concourse, all to be designed by Tonkin Zulaikha Greer.

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