

**Stratford Festival's
Tom Patterson Theatre**





As a teenager growing up in Stratford Tom Patterson thought that a town called Stratford, on an Avon River, with a bust of the famous bard in a Shakespearean Garden, should have a Shakespeare Theatre.

During his army posting to Britain during WWII he came into contact with live theatre there, and was even more convinced.

In 1952 he formed a committee, gathered support, and invited the prominent British director Tyrone Guthrie to visit Stratford to help bring the idea of a Shakespearean theatre to fruition.

Guthrie found the challenge and the opportunities interesting and became the Festival's first artistic director.

Patterson told The Globe and Mail he wanted to provide "Canadian acting talent the opportunity to work with top directors and actors without having to leave the country".



Tyrone Guthrie was intrigued by the challenge of creating a professional theatre in a small and somewhat remote town in a country without a strong theatrical tradition.

But he was also interested in a venture that offered "a fresh advance in the production of Shakespeare" – the possibility of returning to the type of theatre for which Shakespeare wrote his plays.

Shakespeare's actors played on a thrust stage, almost surrounded by the audience. Guthrie wanted to recapture that intimate connection between actors and audience.

He also wanted a stage designed to conform to the conventions of the Elizabethan stage, with certain traditional permanent architectural features, such as a balcony and a trap. There would be no proscenium arch and no curtain.

Guthrie recruited prominent British designer Tanya Moiseiwitsch as founding designer. The Stratford stage was their joint creation.





**Stratford's iconic theatre design.
Since adopted around the world.**



The Stratford Festival opened successfully in 1953, in a tent.



The permanent Festival Theatre followed in 1957, preserving the iconic audience layout and stage design.



**As the Festival grew a former curling rink was enlisted as extra stage space.
But the audience and stage facilities were far from ideal. Replacement was required.**



**And this is it. The new Tom Patterson Theatre.
Actually a theatre complex and community hub.**



The massive complex stretches almost a full block along the river.



The architectural design hides the bulk and blends into the landscape.



The face of the building is clad in vertical glass panels, looking out towards the Avon River. The theatre was scheduled to begin offering performances in 2020. But no.



And there can't even be performances in the theatre in 2021, but the Festival is offering small-group guided tours of the theatre complex.



Once inside we immediately see how the building relates to its river location.



Scott points out the wall honouring the donors so vital to this project. The brick wall wraps around the auditorium, providing sound isolation.



The Tom Patterson Theatre



**The audience wraps around the thrust stage, as in the original Festival Theatre.
Capacity 600 here, versus 1800 there.**



With a stage house with a balcony. And four cast entrances.



With a full trap room below, allowing a trap door to be positioned almost anywhere on the stage, which is more elongated in this theatre.



And, as in the Festival Theatre, a pair of "vomitory" entrances so that players can spew onto the stage from a total of six entrances.



The Festival technical staff specified advanced computer-controlled LED stage lighting.



The control room overlooking the stage houses the production coordination systems and the sound reinforcement controls.



Another performance space in the theatre complex is this Workshop space is for small and experimental plays and for music. It has a sprung floor for dance performances.



Lazaridis Hall is a larger space for drama, music, and seminars.



Lazaridis Hall can be enclosed, as here, or the curtains can be pulled back to reveal the view of the Avon.



The complex has a café, which will have an outdoor patio in coming summer months. And bars for intermission refreshments.



The Members' Lounge is a thank-you for the supporters who made the project possible.



Our tour didn't include the backstage and support areas, which includes a rehearsal hall, but everything that was a problem in the temporary space has been addressed.



The staging of productions in the Tom Patterson Theatre is scheduled to begin in 2022.



Until then we have to leave it in the hands of the ghost light.



2022 will be 70 years since Tom Patterson had his vision of creating a Shakespearean Festival. Now he is being appropriately honoured.