MJP ARCHITECTS
CULTURAL BUILDINGS
MJP are architects of landmark cultural buildings. Past projects include performance spaces, theatres, exhibition buildings, visitors centres and archives. Clients include the BBC, museums, City Councils, universities and others.

The visitor experience Cultural institutions live in a very competitive market. Consumers have unprecedented choice in leisure activities, and their expectations are continually rising.

The design of cultural buildings is crucial to their success. We aim to surprise and delight, by the drama and innovation of the architecture. Also, to enrich the cultural life and townscape of the town or city. The building and its environs can be a big part of the attraction.

Through the quality of our architecture we have been able to develop good relations with town planning departments around the country. New development is heavily regulated. Most sites come under the control of a range of planning policies and directives from other statutory bodies. Careful design and negotiation are required to achieve advantageous planning consents. Our extensive experience brings this advantage.
Flexibility of use is a pre-requisite of many new performance spaces to maximise use and commercial viability.

We designed the 500 seat Gala Theatre, Durham’s principal arts venue, to switch quickly and easily between theatre, cabaret, exhibition and banqueting modes, incorporating air paletted seating. The theatre is arranged to avoid any of the uses being compromised by the flexibility of the design.

Similarly, the auditorium in the Garden Quadrangle at St John’s College, Oxford, can be used for lectures, music recitals and student drama, and the retractable seating allows the floor to be cleared for exhibitions.

“The spectacular and contemporary treatment of the Claypath site forms a dramatic and complementary foil to the historic fabric of the old city, symbolising its cultural regeneration.”

DURHAM CITY COUNCIL
“The new Garden Quadrangle should have a powerful impact on the development of contemporary British architecture.”

JONATHAN GLANCEY, THE INDEPENDENT
“MJP’s commitment to the project was exemplary, as was their attention to the smallest detail of the design. They constantly strived to achieve the highest quality within the budget available, and the end result is a seamless blend of the historic and the unashamedly modern.”

PETER GOODSHIP
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
PORTSMOUTH NAVAL BASE PROPERTY TRUST

Some auditoria need to be designed exclusively for specialist uses. In the Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, we converted Boathouse 6, a Victorian scheduled monument, to incorporate interactive exhibition spaces and a cinema providing an immersive experience for the audience with 70mm film projection, a big screen and steeply raking seating.

The Wellcome Wolfson Building (at the Science Museum, London) houses the Dana Centre, a new public facility for the presentation and discussion of topical scientific issues using traditional and new media. A double height café, 150-seat flexible auditorium, 50-seat seminar room and exhibition area are distributed over the lowest three floors.
“MJP produced an inspirational and highly effective design for the transformation of BBC Broadcasting House.”

JOHN SMITH, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, BBC

For the BBC, we restored the 1930s Radio Theatre and upgraded it for modern broadcasting. It is part of our design for the Broadcasting House redevelopment in Portland Place, London.

We preserved the special character of the art deco interior while equipping it for the full range of modern events. Our work gave it the flexibility and accessibility required to sustain it commercially.
Sometimes the building can be part of the drama of the exhibition. Our design for the Wellcome Wing at the Science Museum in London seeks to amaze and heighten expectation. It’s like a theatre of science where the drama is both in the building and its contents. The brief was for flexible column free exhibition space and a 450 seat Imax cinema. The deep blue interior creates a sense of mystery, hinting at the infinite possibilities of science.

In the Yangzhou Cultural Centre and the British Road Transport Museum, the drama of the museum is revealed outside as well as inside. The outside is designed to attract visitors and let them glimpse what they have come to see.
“It has delivered exactly what we set out to deliver. It has united and connected key elements within the city centre; it has re-established the ancient topography of the city; it has rediscovered our very rich past but given a very clear manifestation of our very positive future.”

JOHN MCGUIGAN, COVENTRY CITY COUNCIL

EXHIBITION SPACES

Sometimes display spaces and galleries need to provide a neutral background to the exhibits. The Priory Visitors Centre (part of our ‘Phoenix Initiative’ masterplan in Coventry) houses an interpretive exhibition of the artefacts found in archaeological excavations of the ruins of an 11th century priory. A massive 17th century wall, built on the foundations of the original nave wall, has been repaired and extended to form the north wall of the Priory garden, where the old foundations are displayed, and the south wall of the Centre. The roof of the Centre appears to float above.
The challenge is to incorporate modern facilities in historic and listed buildings which were not originally designed to accommodate them. Respect for the architecture and conservation of the fabric is paramount, and historic research underpins all our work.

Boathouse 6, a Victorian warehouse for boats and a scheduled monument in the Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, has a rare form of cast iron and wrought iron structure. We converted it to house an interactive exhibition about the modern Navy with a large new cinema. Modern insertions contrast dynamically with the historic architecture. Retrieval of original design features assisted the adaptation to its new use and a rigorous, simple services strategy facilitates future change and preserves the clear uncluttered interior.
Many traditional cultural buildings are ‘gas guzzlers’. We seek greener solutions.

**Auditoria** For many years it has been assumed that large auditoria have to be air conditioned. However, we are now working with specialist engineers to prove that a satisfactory environment can be created with natural ventilation using a well conceived control system.

**Archive storage, secure by design** Traditionally they have depended on air conditioning, and this is costly to install and to run. We designed the first two passively controlled archives, meeting the requirements of BS 5454 without air conditioning. One is the Ruskin Library housing the Whitehouse Collection of works by John Ruskin, the other is the States of Jersey Archive.

The Ruskin archive store, ‘the Treasury’ is a building within a building, surrounded by reading rooms, gallery space and offices. This creates an environmental buffer and achieves the stable conditions in the archive required for the conservation of the artefacts.
We have designed major exhibitions for the ‘Tate Modern’ and ‘Tate Britain’. ‘Ruskin, Turner and Pre-Raphaelites’, and ‘Surrealism – Desire Unbound’ explored the use of coloured walls of light to give each room a distinct character.

We have designed museums with purpose made show cases to control the environmental conditions for sensitive and valuable exhibits in the Ruskin Archive and St John’s College, Oxford.
Our work has always reflected a passion for the exploration of colour, materials and surfaces. This has led to many collaborations with leading international artists.

Collaborations in projects for LHA London, St John's College, Oxford; Southwark Underground Station; and Sutton Walk, Waterloo, all involve the use of glass.

In our ‘Phoenix Initiative’ masterplan for Coventry city centre we worked with many artists on major public art installations that help define this new cultural quarter for the city, and create development value for adjacent rundown inner city sites.

We have also collaborated with a host of other artists in projects for the BBC, Warwick University and the Maggie’s Centre in Cheltenham.
Running costs can be greatly reduced by minimising maintenance and using efficient maintenance regimes. These objectives need to be achieved in the design process. We have built up knowledge of materials, products and systems and their suitability for cultural buildings. Some of our design aims are:

— Choice of self-finished materials which do not require re-decoration.
— Control of rainwater run-off to minimise staining of the outer walls and, where possible, protection from the rain.
— Use of durable materials, commensurate with their use and exposure.
— External wall details which are robust and have two lines of defence.
— Ease of access.

MJP Architects are also working in these other sectors.