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HMFH designs UMass' Rand Theater renovation

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According to HMFH Architects, design is underway for the renovation to the performance and rehearsal space at the Rand Theater at UMass Amherst. The renovations will foster the theater department's emphasis on collaboration and mentoring, while providing greater flexibility for teaching and production.

For nearly 40 years, the Department of Theater at UMass Amherst's Fine Arts Center has been a center for teaching and theater training. Part of an original concrete complex designed by Kevin Roche and largely untouched since 1975, the Rand Theater is receiving much-needed upgrades that embrace its 1970s concrete architecture while also better serving its current program needs. HMFH has been selected to renovate the 575-seat Rand, which has continental-style seating with wide spacing between the rows to allow for better circulation and had relied on carpeting on most horizontal and vertical surfaces for acoustics. The renovation of the Rand Theater will include the removal of the low walls currently separating the rows of seating in the orchestra area, resulting in a connection between the performers and the audience.

Acoustical modeling has been undertaken to ensure that the current warm acoustic qualities will be maintained as new finishes and treatments are installed that replace the carpeted walls. HMFH will create a new accessible seating area and refurbish all of the existing seating that has endured more than three decades of wear.

This will allow UMass Amherst to accommodate performances of all sizes. The design also improved teaching facilities which will allow for the latest technology including better lighting and sound control.

"Over the years, we have designed specialized facilities for music, dance, the visual arts, and theater," said Laura Wernick, AIA, REFP, LEED AP, senior principal at HMFH Archts. "For the Rand Theater renovation, the school wanted more flexibility as well as an updated look all within the existing concrete architecture. Our design makes modifications to the space and allows for more flexibility, better use of technology, and a modern feel while respecting the original concrete design intent."

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