

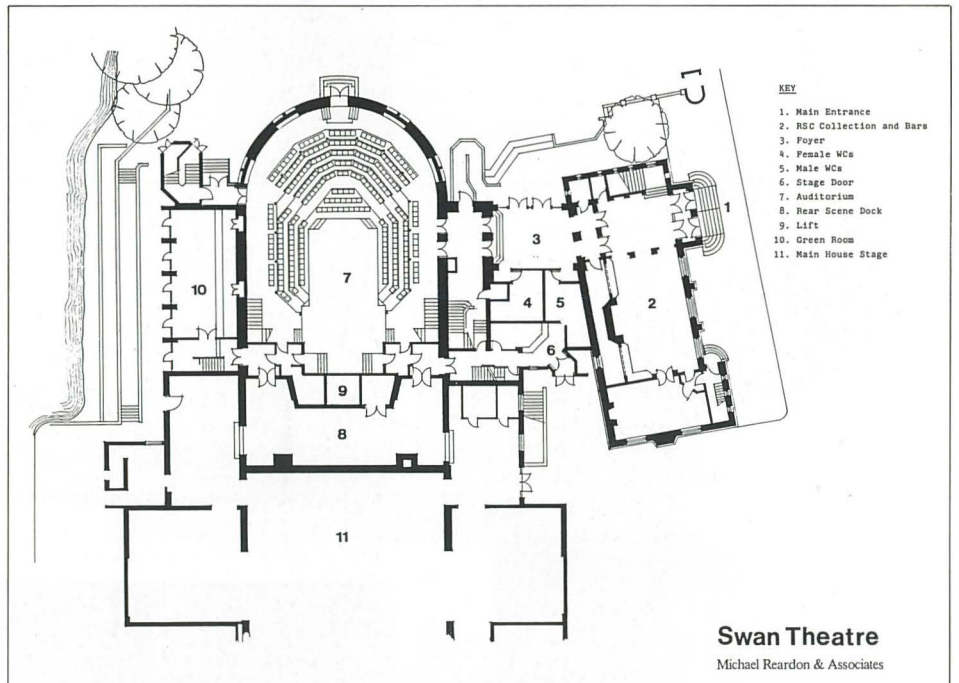
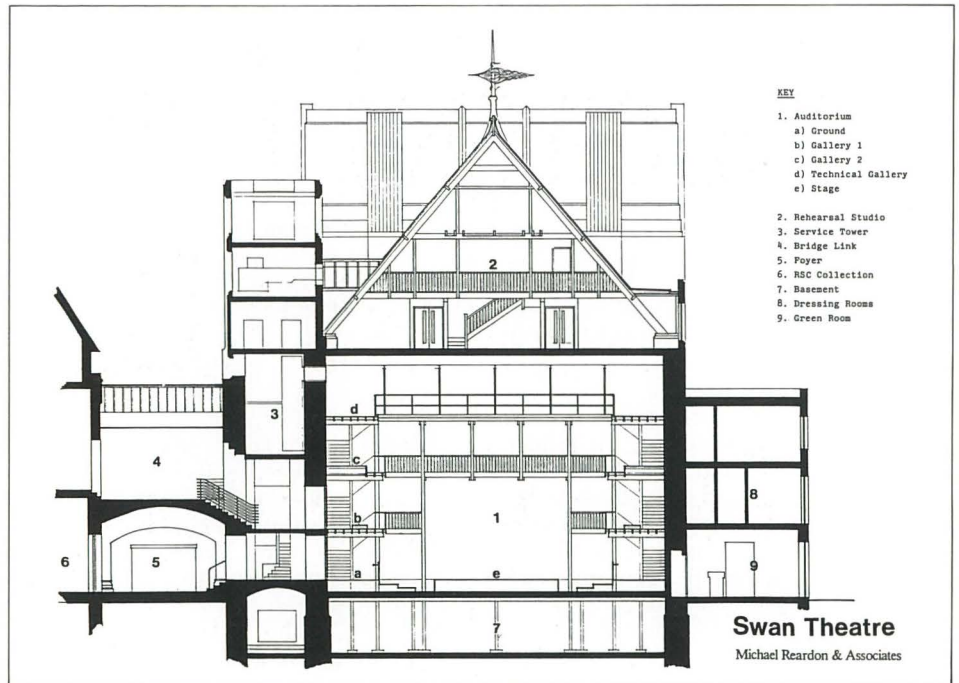
damaged by fire sixty years ago was something of a challenge to the structural engineers: that they were able to do so is something of a tribute to the builders of Victorian Stratford who evidently applied sounder construction techniques than were sometimes the fate of theatres in some of the more metropolitan areas. The whole of the rehearsal room is supported by precast concrete floor units 17.5m long, with each unit weighing 17.5 tonnes. The roof structure uses fifteen laminated timber rafters, each of them made by gluing together smaller timber members to produce a beam 13.5m long, 200mm wide, 500mm deep and weighing three quarters of a ton. Other tricky structural problems, happily resolved, included the need for the balustrades of the galleries to be more slender than envisaged in the latest codes of practice; but patrons can lean without fear, the strength of these balustrades has been justified by load testing.

The rehearsal room sets a new standard for actors working conditions. It is light, airy and with panoramic views of town and country through timbered windows with strong gothic resonances. There is an associated green room and a terrace with an outlook normally a privilege reserved for fly towers. It is to be hoped that the public will be able to share the pleasures of this room and indeed there is strong possibility that it could be licensed for intimate performances involving a hundred or so spectators.

The RSC are reticent about details of the capital costs which have been covered totally by an anonymous donor who was inspired by coming across (when, would you believe, taking shelter on a rainy afternoon) the architect's model commissioned in 1978 but laid aside in financial despair. This American benefactor also requires the extent of his donation to remain secret, so the only figure to be found amongst the press releases is the round '£1.5 million net' tucked away in the architect's c.v. Tax payers, ratepayers and fellow Arts Council clients are assured that any running costs additional to the present RSC budget will be met totally from the Swan's box office. With more reason than ever for theatre lovers to visit Stratford, this should not be a problem.

Until relatively recently, theatre design involved a reaction against the past, often discarding the good as well as the less good. This approach has increasingly been replaced by an analytical looking back to older forms of staging in order to extract the essence of form and function. As the Swan's architect, Michael Reardon, says *You can't make replicas of buildings which once existed; buildings are like producing the great classic plays — they have to be made afresh for each generation.* In Stratford's Swan, Michael Reardon has done this superlatively well. My praise is unequivocal and unstinted.

It could well be argued, and I am certainly prepared to do so, that theatre architecture is reaching something of a maturity in the closing decades of the twentieth century: a



coexistence of many styles, all with their roots in the past yet relevant to the possible parallel styles for staging in terms of today's concepts, both philosophical and visual.

The stated policy is rediscovery of drama of the period between 1570 and 1750. But

the Swan is more than a laboratory for exploring the past: it will be an inspiration to new playwrights, to architects and to all of us who seek from the stage or from the auditorium to communicate through performance.

<i>Architects:</i>	Michael Reardon & Associates
<i>Design Team:</i>	Michael Reardon Reg Ellis Tim Furby John Berrington
<i>Project Architect:</i>	Reg Ellis assisted by Tony Harman
<i>Theatre Consultants:</i>	The Royal Shakespeare Theatre
<i>Structural Engineers:</i>	Gifford & Partners
<i>Mechanical & Electrical Consultants:</i>	Peter Hey & Partners
<i>Quantity Surveyor:</i>	Gordon Cain
<i>Acoustic Consultant:</i>	Dr David Walters
<i>General Contractor:</i>	William Weaver Limited