

Guild Hall theater completes renovation, part of a \$29M capital improvement

Adina Genn // June 5, 2024 //



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In East Hampton, the Guild Hall theater has completed its renovation, which is part of a \$29 million capital improvement project.

To celebrate the renovation, the venue is hosting “An evening with Billy Porter,” a benefit concert on Friday, July 12, at 8 p.m. Porter starred in Broadway’s Kinky Boots and his portrayal of Pray Tell in the FX series, Pose. Attendees are encouraged to dress in “creative attire,” according to a news release about the theater’s reopening.

First announced in 2021, the project includes facility-wide improvements, including the institution’s galleries, education space, art handling, gardens, and offices that were completed in July 2023.

As of April, the theater reached 86% of its \$29 million goal, thanks to its board of trustees and other supporters.

With a “landmark gift” from the Morgan family that “enabled the complete transformation of the theater,” the venue has announced the new Hilarie and Mitchell Morgan Theater. The amount of the gift was not disclosed.

“We’ve had meaningful and inspiring experiences in this theater, and we hope this gift will ensure it remains a special place for future generations,” Guild Hall Trustee Hilarie Morgan and husband Mitchell Morgan said jointly in a news release about the theater’s reopening.

The Morgans have a home in Sagaponack. Hilarie Morgan, a former psychologist who serves on the boards of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Norton Museum of Art, joined the Guild Hall board of trustees in 2021. Her husband, Mitchell Morgan, is the founder and chairman of Morgan Properties, which focuses on investment and management of multifamily properties. Mitchell chairs Temple University’s board of trustees and was recently elected to the Guggenheim Museum’s board.

The theater at Guild Hall, which opened in 1931, was previously named as a tribute to John Drew. Born in 1853, Drew was a stage actor who spent summers in East Hampton. Guild Hall said it would commemorate Drew with signage and name the senior staff position in the theater the “John Drew Director of Performing Arts” in honor of this history.

The venue's renovation was led by New York-based Peter Pennoyer Architects, which specializes in preservation of historic architecture, in consultation with New York-based Apeiro Design, which incorporated advanced audio-visual technologies, lighting and acoustics into the space. The upgrades included the restoration of the stage's scalloped proscenium frame, which was part of the theater's original design by Aymar Embury II.

The theater's circus-tent ceiling motif and balloon chandelier remain, and non-original elements, including moldings and wallcoverings, were updated to reflect the theater's 1930s design. The flow of the theater was restored by removing non-original doors at the entrance to the theater corridor. In a nod to Embury's architecture, columns in the lobby were restored. The theater-seating now features prime orchestra seats, adds greater row-to-row depth, offers broader and more comfortable seating, and enhances sightlines through an increased floor rake. There is also flexible social space at the rear of the orchestra, replacing the boxes.

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Upcoming concerts include Rufus Wainwright, the Branford Marsalis Quartet and others. HamptonsFilm SummerDocs will return, as will the Stirring the Pot culinary conversation series with Florence Fabricant featuring Daniel Humm, Giada de Laurentiis, Pam Weekes and Connie McDonald of Levain Bakery, and Marcus Samuelsson.

Guild Hall will launch a new series, Academy Icons, a mini-retrospective of films by documentary director and producer Susan Lacy, followed by conversations with special guests. New York City Ballet will host a "behind the curtain" performance, and Hamptons Dance Project returns to Fireplace Lodge. Comedians include Zainab Johnson, Dulcé Sloan, and humorist David Sedaris.

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