

- 
- category
 - project address
 - designer
 - 11 – Commercial
 - Conversion of Old La Boite Theatre to commercial offices.
Hale Street, Milton
 - Latemore Design

Category 11 : La Boite Commercial

2009

Queensland Building Design Awards

design brief

- Building was bought “by accident” at an auction by a family member of a building development company.
- As such, client was unsure how best to use a peculiar and heritage listed edifice. Everyone thought the building was ugly and designer was requested to develop a better way to use it.
- If possible client wanted maximum use of the building as a commercial city office building that could be leased.
- Solve almost no parking.
- Upgrade all facilities if plumbing allowed.
- Provide disabled access as minimally required to suit rules.
- Minimal structural changes as possible
- Provide extra entry.
- Designer was required to deal with moral rights of original architect.

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Design analysis

- Property is on the state heritage register because it is the first purpose built building for “in the round” theatre in Australia. It is also listed due to its unique brick external fabric in a box shape which is why it was called La Boite (The Box in French).
- As such, very stringent restrictions existed on how to use or change the building. This included two major factors – the external fabric could not be touched but openings could be changed; and the theatre space was to be retained in a way that its previous use was obvious. The graffiti on the actors tunnel walls was required to be protected in some way.
- Converting building from theatre to commercial required considerable research including negotiations with all authorities and consultants, to resolve things like accessibility, plumbing, parking and the big one – permission to do anything.
- A Development Application was required and involved multiple referral agencies and endless negotiations with many people having differing agendas.
- Blair Wilson, original architect, was approached and informed of proposal, to gain advice and approval.

Category 11 : La Boite Commercial

design outcome

- Designer suggested early in the process to create dual tenancies with separate entries and facilities but with a shared passenger lift.
- Agencies were first approached to obtain preliminary approval for the scheme so that time was not wasted.
- Previous heritage experience told us to retain as much fabric and character as we possibly could while still providing maximum commercial space.
- This was achieved by creating the two tenancies with different lessees in mind. The lower rabbit warren was ideal for a small but busy firm needing private and separate office spaces. The upper theatre zone with minor revisions became best for a very open plan orientated business.
- Lower region was revamped into a self contained city branch office as it later transpired for the client. (refer interior award entry)
- The mezzanine in the upper theatre region was well accepted by the EPA, because the shape is reminiscent of theatre in the round. Clients thought it was good because it increased leasable area by 50%.



La Boite in its inner city context. Being surrounded by residential required considerable care. This is the view from Lang Park.



before

Before at left, a tired and neglected building, almost an eyesore facing busy Hale Street and Lang Park.



The new improved version, things tidied and the building standing more proud.



before

Original Hale Street end of building, at left, and the old stage door.

New Hale St façade at right with car parking spaces, tidier gardens and new large glazed entry doors creating a real face. Much negotiation occurred with council regarding the parking, as the spaces are slightly too short and limited in number. This was resolved by encouraging bike usage and traffic engineering studies.





before

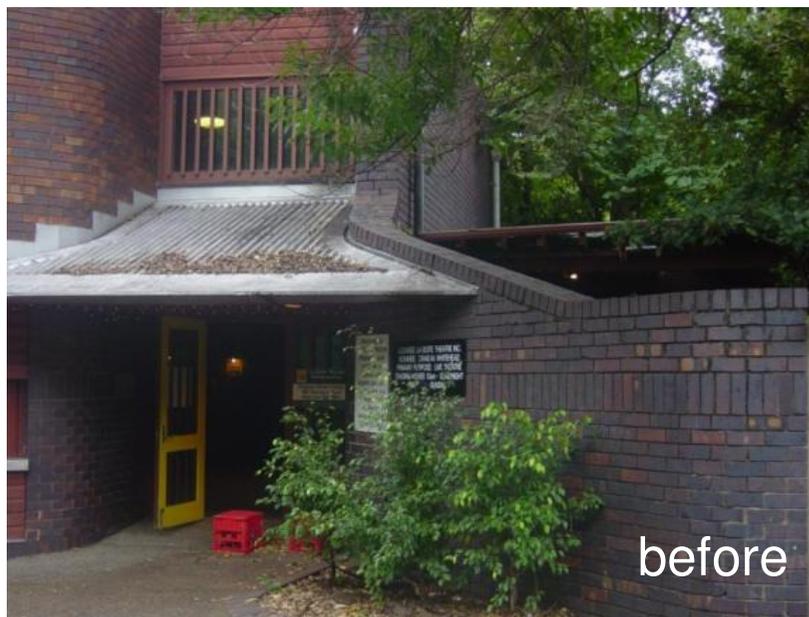
Below - Sexton Street side of building now. As can be seen, minimal change has occurred to the building to achieve change from neglected theatre to high class city office. The tall dock doors are now ac grilles, old ticket window is now meter box, all coloured to match original. The 'La Boite' sign was not wanted by theatre group, so has been retained.

Above - Original theatre entrance side of building, off side street (Sexton Street).



after

You can see Lang Park in the background!



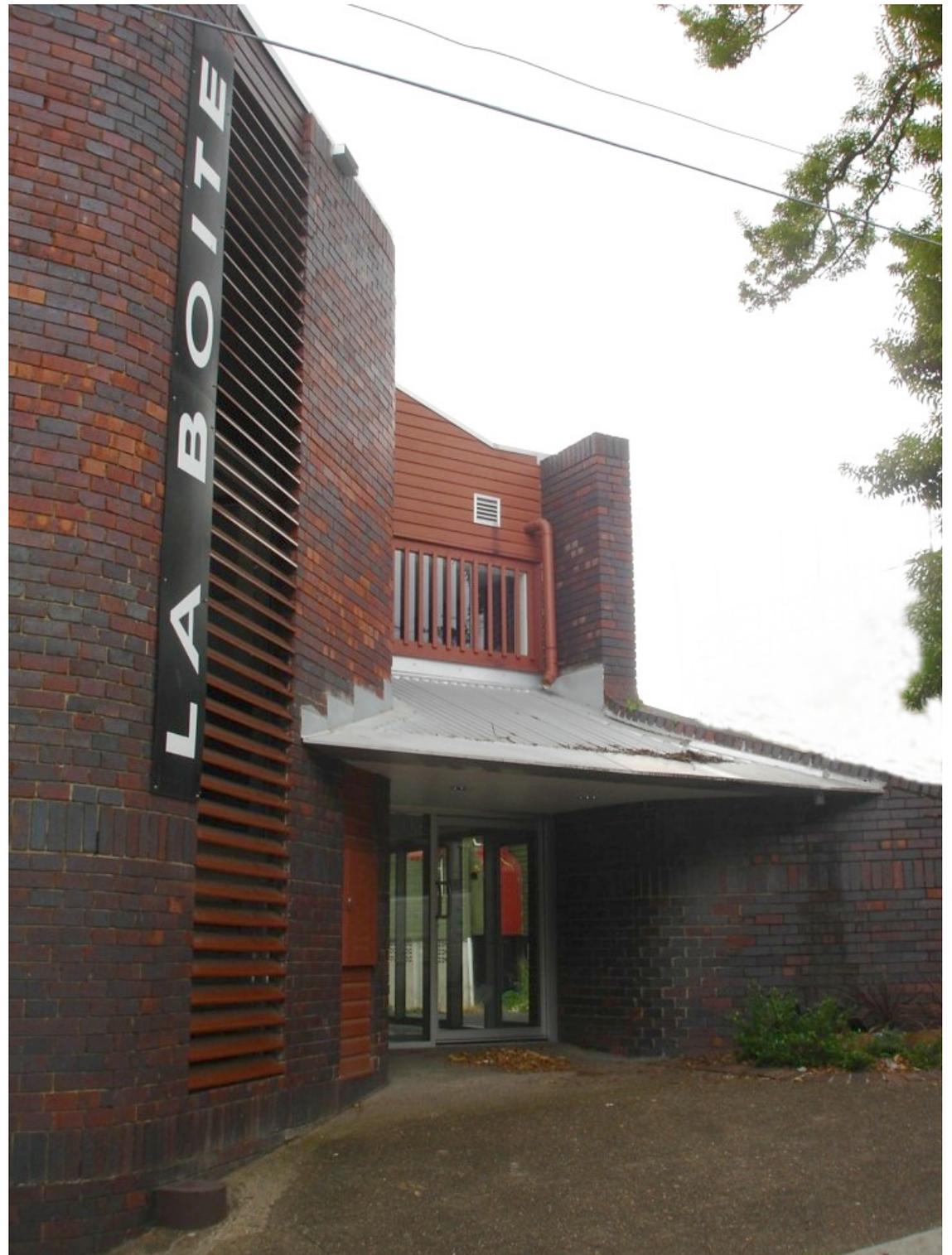
Main entrance to building, before and after. This is now the front door to tenancy two. Both entrances are wheelchair friendly, so both tenancies are fully accessible (to all levels). Note that all external fabric except openings has been protected, as required by EPA.





Original entry door.

Close up of renewed
Sexton Street side,
entry into tenancy two.





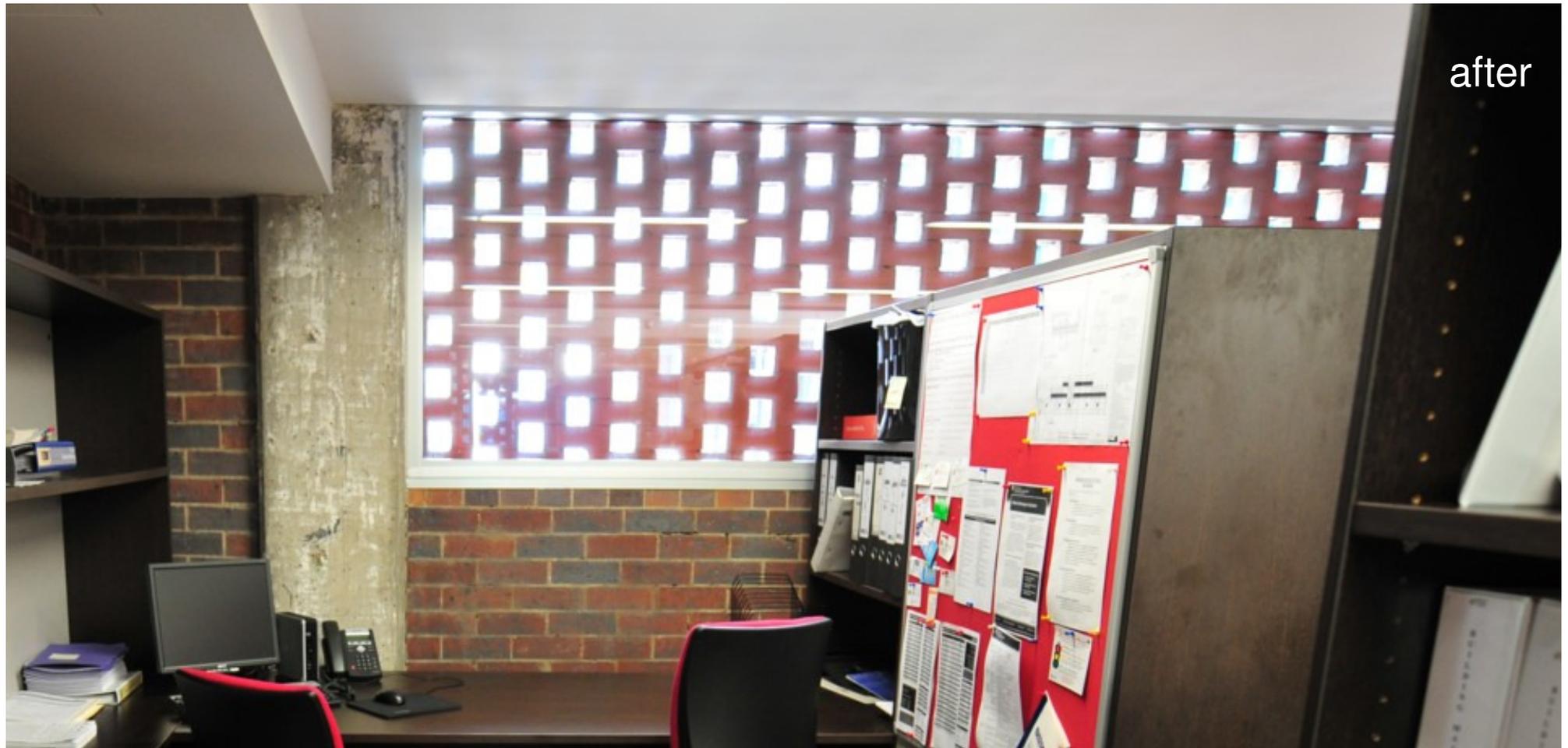
The original stage door was used to become the new entry for tenancy one. The slab was cut down for easier access and larger doors.



The old lower level, transformed into useful space. This shows the reception for the new lower tenancy.



Lower level has breeze way brick work externally at openings and originally had broken louvres. Photo below shows how fixed glazing was used to enhance and better use these. Also note all current services directly under theatre slab in left photo, all now moved and/or concealed.





before



before

The original lower level – the rabbit warren of brick walls, all load bearing.

Now converted to well organised meeting and office spaces as per below photos.

after



after





This photo combines all elements – rounded wall now fully visible, cleaned original brick work, fixed glazing over breeze way brick, new clean ceilings just under slab. New organized office layouts making most efficient use of a fairly tight area.

before



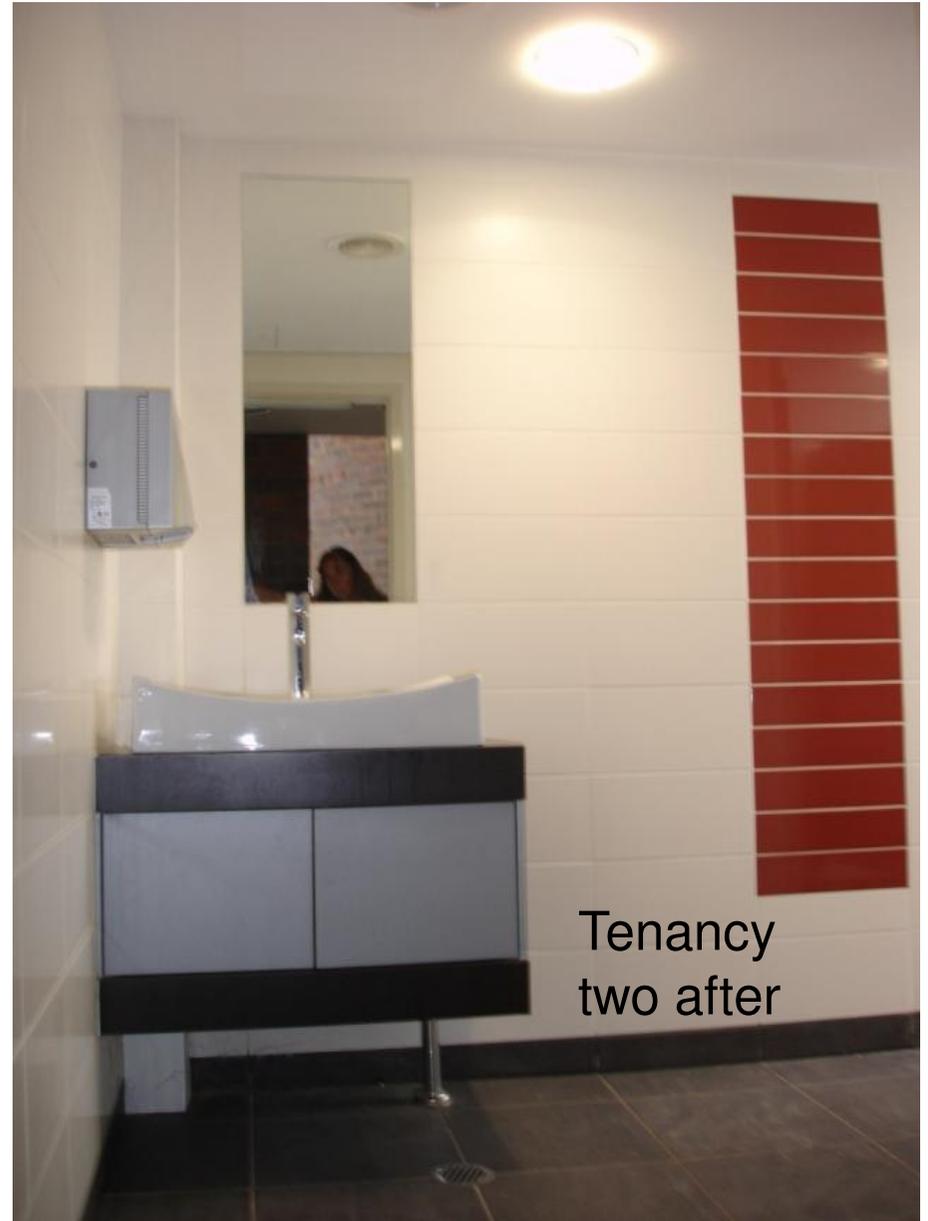
before



Original facilities were totally made over with wall covering tiles, feature elements and decent fittings. Even waterless urinals.



Tenancy one after



Tenancy two after



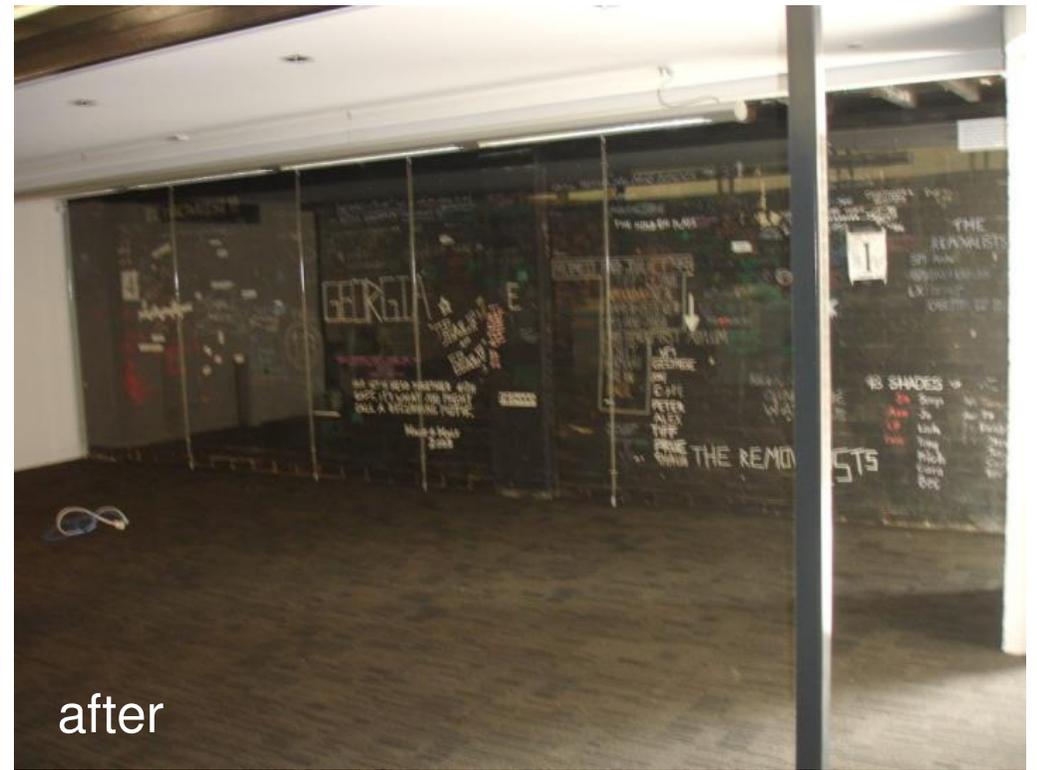
after

The old theatre space transformed with mezzanine, glass handrails, new lift, better lighting and lots of bright paint. It was decided not to clean the brick, because of the lack of natural light and there was a lot already painted black which was difficult to remove.

Original theatre seating on tiered timber boxes inside a blackened space. EPA allowed removal of seats and boxes after negotiation.



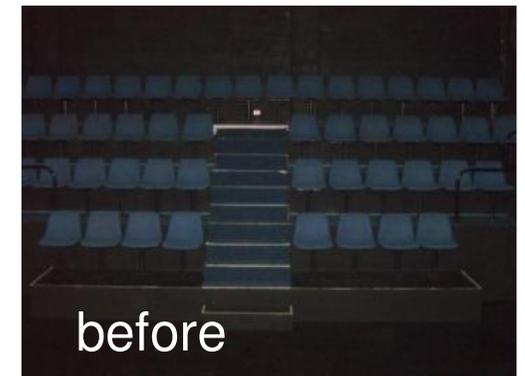
before

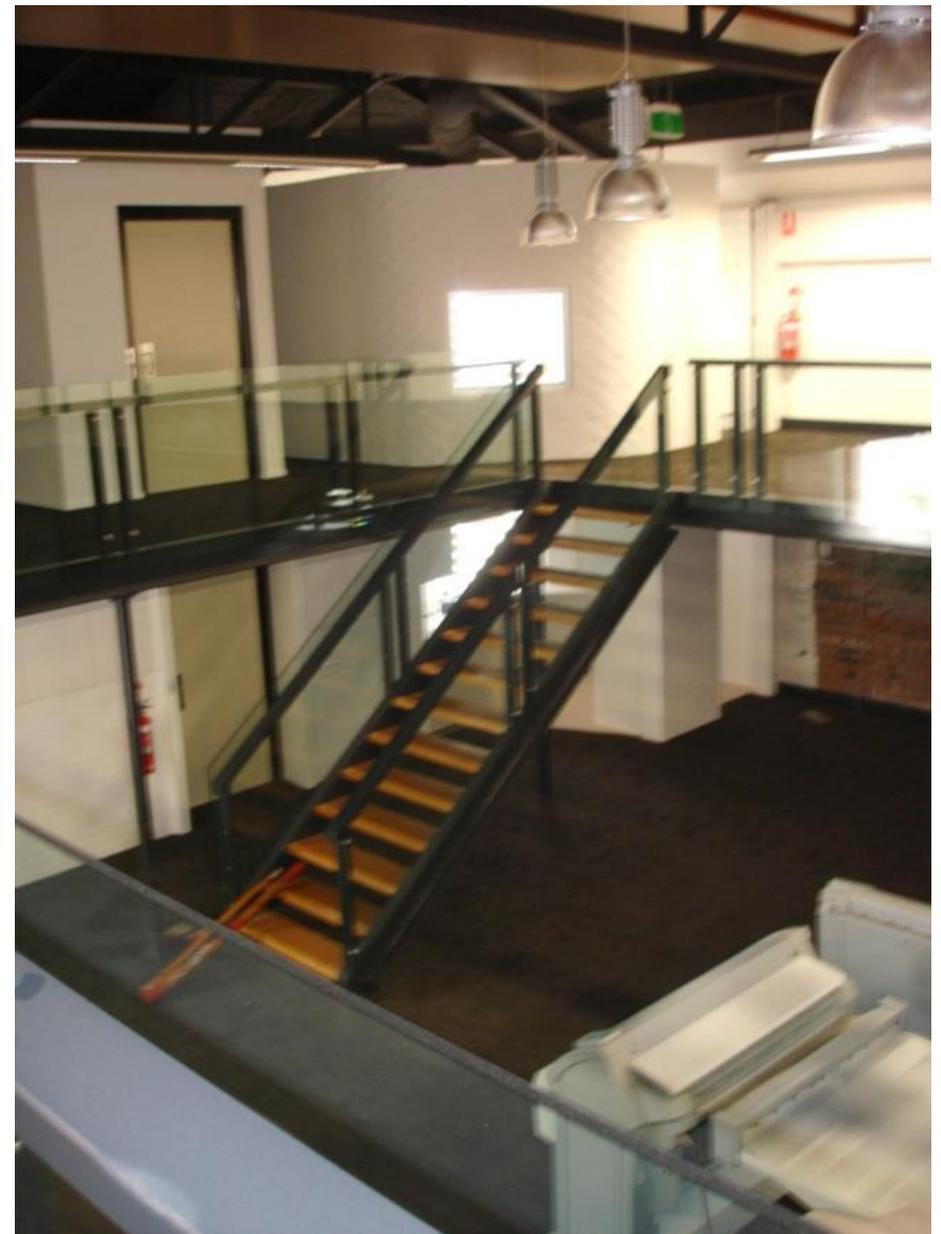


These photos illustrate the added mezzanine to theatre space adding much extra floor area and reflecting the original theatre in the round use. Note the perspex placed over the original graffiti by actors when using and waiting in the tunnels behind the tiered seating.

This is a perfect example of using heritage as a feature rather than competing against it.

The mezzanine had special engineering and detailing so it impacts minimally on the building and can be removed later – all part of the Burra Charta principles.





New open riser stairs to allow for openness. Stairs were relocated from original design to keep them nearer lift. Note large spot lights to increase general lighting. Also for cost saving, client did not install sky lights that were in original design.



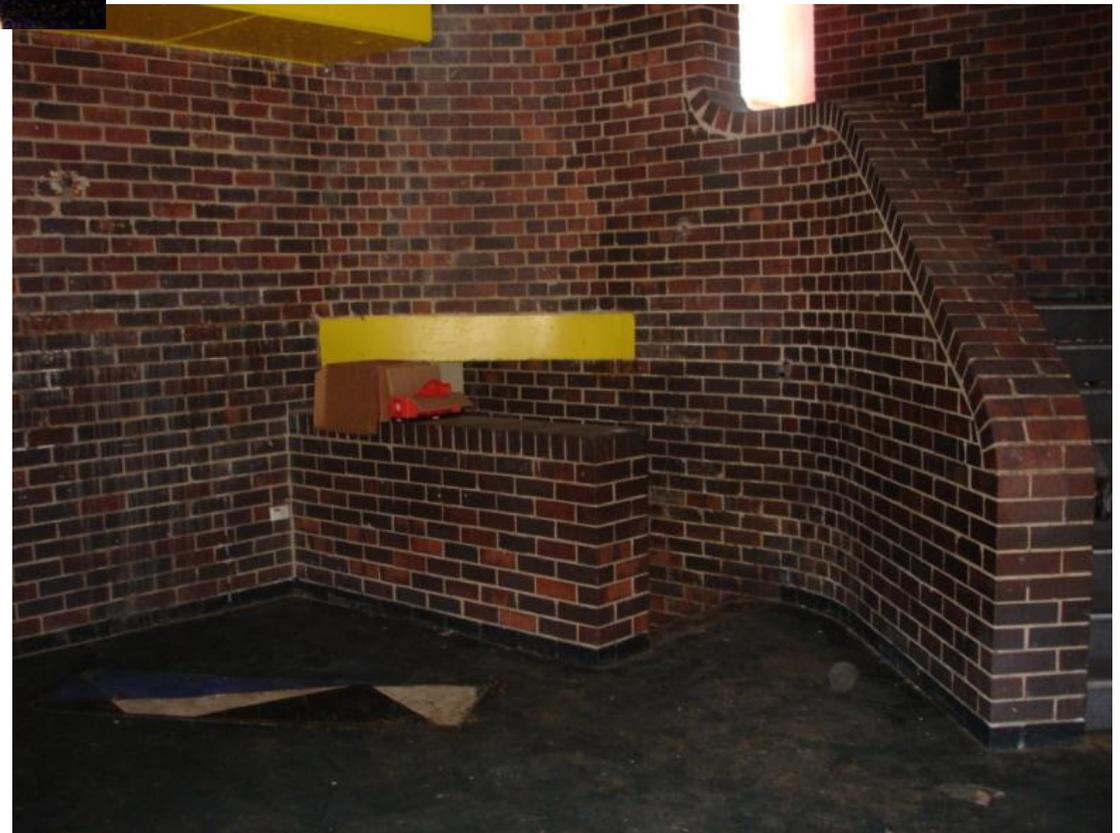
Upper mezzanine level close to original steel roof structure. Rather than clad this structure, large veneer panels were inserted hanging near bottom of trusses. Such insertions are classic interpretation of the Burra Charta which stipulates that new elements are seen as 'new' and can be removed at later times.





The original foyer space and stairs up to theatre and down to public toilets. Left photo is view from canteen.

This space only needed some painting and cleaning.





Inside the 'front' door, before and after. EPA allowed original joinery to be renewed, which has modernised the region. Dark carpet replaced with reflective tiles similar to lower reception to further lighten the space. Note the graffitied timber panels on wall at top left, which were taken from the actor tunnels and protected as artwork features.



Some original theatre sign work some of which was required to be retained.





Fixed glazing inserted in original fire exit door way, increasing natural light. The old timber fire stairs could be removed with change of use and also because they were straddling neighbouring property.



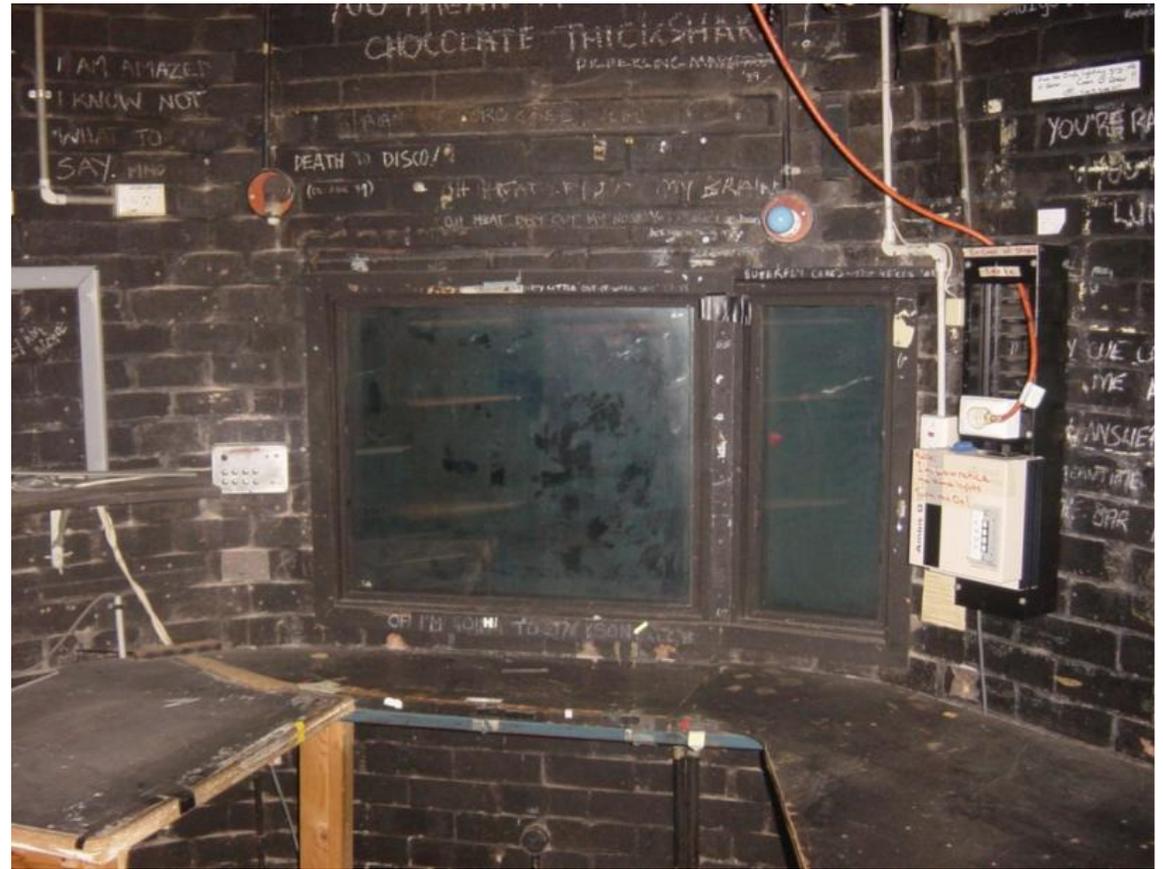
The original dark theatre lobby was transformed into a light box by inserting glazing which throws light across the old stage floor. Carpet was used here to reduce sound reflection.



The old fire stairs. These were nearly falling down anyway and were removed. All the openings were replaced with fixed glazing.



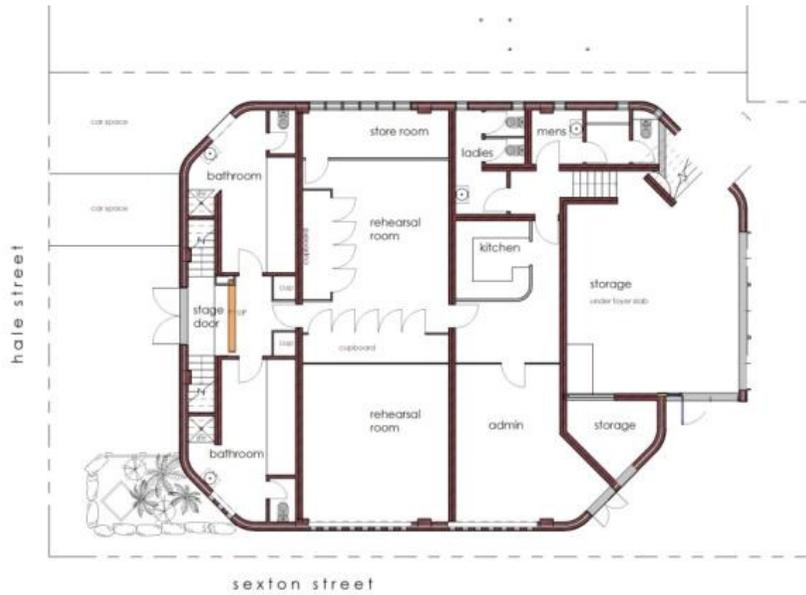
Close up of original roof structure with all the supporting rig for lights and sound. EPA with negotiation allowed all this to be removed.



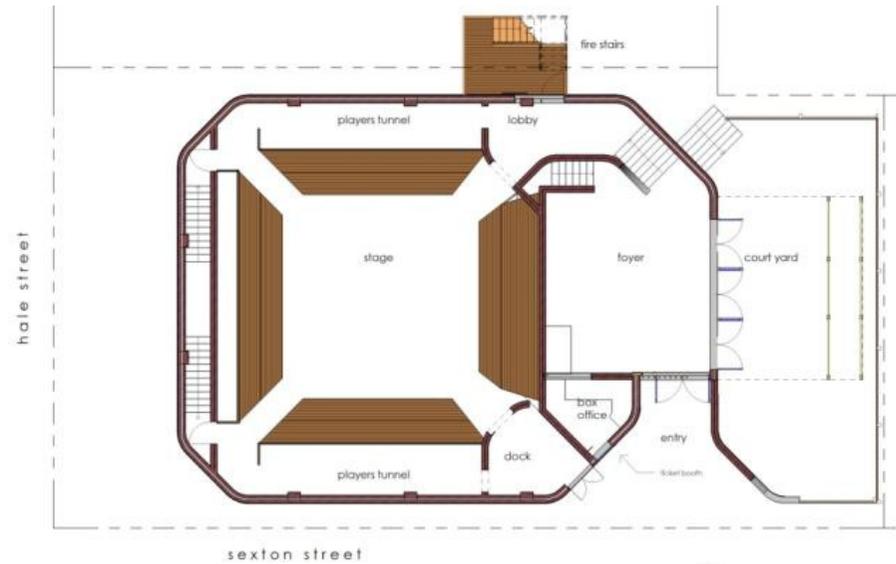
Some of the difficulties in dealing with an abandoned theatre.

At left the exposed electrics next to stage door which required complete overhaul and some concealment.

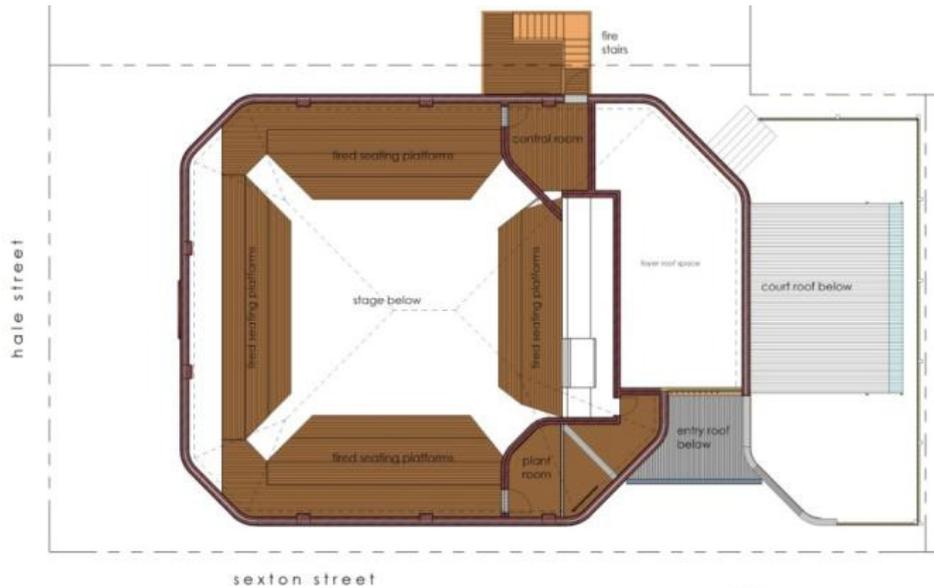
Above was the control room for theatre all complete with messy services and blackened walls.



original lower plan



original mid plan



original upper plan



Original floor plans

Top left, the lower region with lots of rooms.

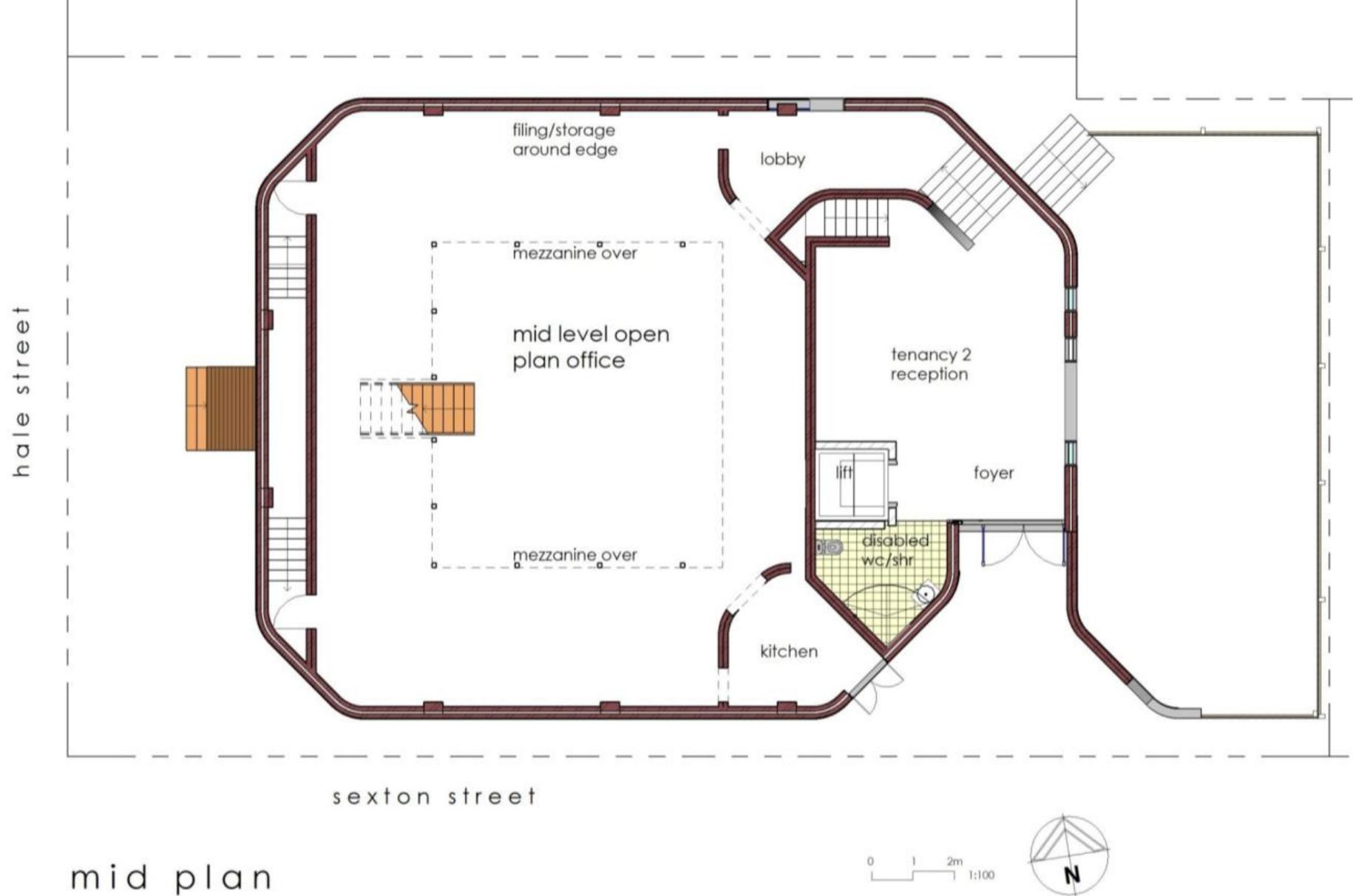
Top right, mid level, the foyer at right off Sexton St, which lead up to theatre on left.

Bottom left, the upper regions where higher seating and control rooms were located.

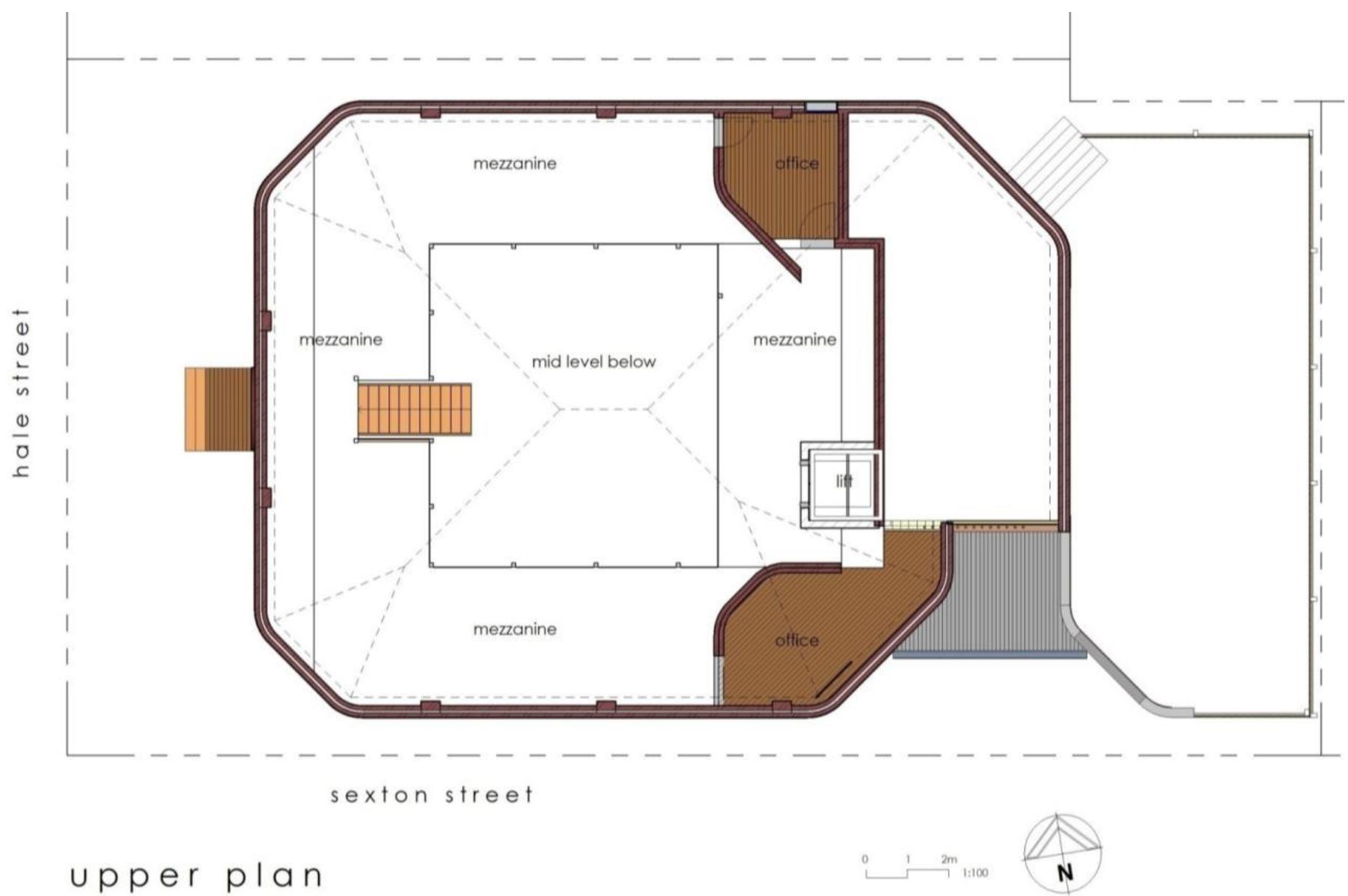


lower plan

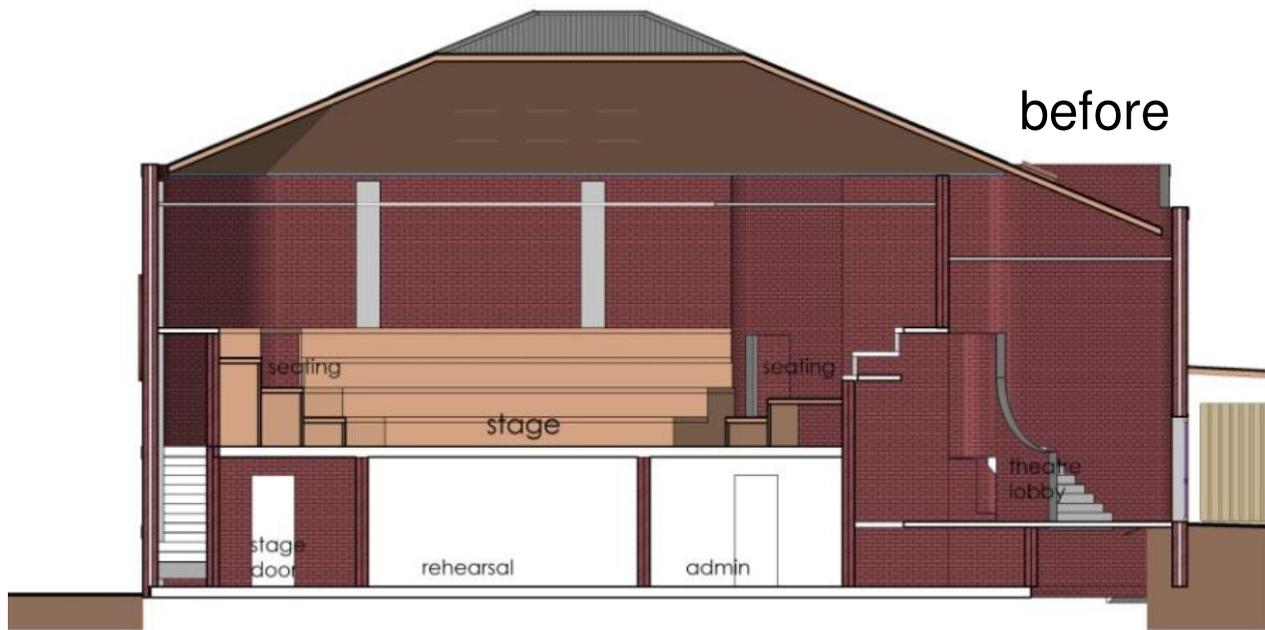
Lower region is mostly tenancy one - a compartmentalized city office. At right the lobby and entry is for tenancy two. The lift and disabled wc is shared by both tenancies.



Mid level (tenancy 2) is the old theatre floor and is now a large open plan office region ready for lease. Dotted line indicates mezzanine over.



New mezzanine at upper level surrounding the old theatre space being reminiscent of the old seating arrangement. This was a particular favourite of the EPA. It also provides access into the original control rooms which are now private offices at a high level. The lift was finally decided to link every level.



before

Sections through building both before and after.

These show the original volumes being reused in sensitive ways that respect the reasons for heritage building of the old theatre.

original section east/west



after

New section at bottom also illustrates the inserted lift which links four levels including the original foyer.

section east/west

