



FACILITIES & MAINTENANCE

Small Theater, Big Transformation: Reinventing Seating at Vanderbilt's Rothschild Theater

BY ANNIE THELAN

In the heart of Nashville, Tennessee, the private Vanderbilt University has boasted a strong reputation for academics, athletics, and performances since its founding in 1873. With more than 70 undergraduate majors, there's a great diversity in students, faculty, and visitors who come to Vanderbilt each year.

Vanderbilt is also home to the Rothschild College, the school's second residential college in Nashville's West End neighborhood. It's where you can find the Rothschild Blackbox Theater on the bottom floor, an intimate theater with a 76-person capacity and the ability to host a wide variety of performances. From lectures and presentations to movie night, this theater effortlessly adapts to any event. So when the time came for new seating to be installed, Vanderbilt needed something versatile and ergonomic to suit this one-of-a-kind spot on campus.

Vanderbilt chose Audience Systems, the UK's leading manufacturer of retractable seating for auditoriums, schools, and more.

Audience Systems works with facilities to design precisely the right seating solution to fit their unique needs. For the Rothschild Blackbox Theater there was no shortage of possibilities, and with guidance from both Vanderbilt and Audience Systems, the team was able to find the right fit.

Vanderbilt settled on a highly customized version of the Eclipse model seat. This space-saving chair is based on the gravity tip-up mechanism, which allows the seat to fold into a small envelope quietly, which is perfect for performances and speakers. This elegant seat is sleek and compact yet remains comfortable for any body shape. The modified version of the Eclipse Seat for the Rothschild Blackbox

Theater is beautifully suited for the space—quiet, versatile, and comfortable.

Not only was the right seating important to keep spectators comfortable, but so was the look for the seating. The updated seating was designed to match the theater's existing aesthetic. The Blackbox Theater is the smaller, more intimate performance center on campus, and the updated seating needed to complement the feel of the space.

A specific palette of finishes was chosen for the chairs and telescopic system, blending seamlessly with the color palette already present in the space. The rich, dark tones are present in all the components, from the Louisiana Wenge finish on the platform's edge to the stained seat and back timbers that match. Not only do the seats match the performance space, but so does the telescopic

system itself. This creates a cohesive, stunning look from the moment you step into the theater.

Along with matching the color scheme and vibe of the Blackbox Theater, the telescopic system and seating needed to function perfectly for the theatre's needs. Remaining static was not an option, given the theater's wide range of uses. The seating was designed to accommodate this, with the ability to retract and extend by simply folding the side rails and pressing a button.

Not only can the seating be entirely retracted, but the seating rake can be partially opened to reduce the number of seats available. This allows for a much more intimate setting, bringing the audience closer to the speaker, movie, or performance. With this functionality, the Rothschild Blackbox

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Theater is equally suited for both larger crowds and smaller audiences—no matter how many people show up to a performance, presentation, lecture, or movie, the theater will be cozy and intimate.

Rothschild Blackbox Theater is a hot spot for everything on campus, and the outstanding seating provided by Audience Systems is designed for everyone to feel welcome. With the perfect system installed, guests will be comfortable and focused

on what matters, the event. Not only has Vanderbilt achieved its vision for the theater today, it will continue to thrive for years to come. Audience Systems provides lifetime support for the installation, including the chairs and telescopic system, to ensure that it's kept in top shape for decades.

The seating transformation at Vanderbilt's Rothschild Blackbox Theater demonstrates what's possible when seating is designed with both function and audience experience in mind. Audience Systems specializes in creating seating solutions tailored to each venue's unique requirements—whether that means designing custom configurations for intimate spaces, engineering retractable systems for multipurpose facilities, or reimagining traditional auditorium layouts. From initial consultation through installation, their team works closely with clients to ensure every detail serves the venue's vision. The result is seating that enhances both the performance and the audience's connection to it.



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