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# The Hudson Theater Is Back on Broadway

By Erik Piepenburg



The exterior of the Hudson Theater on 44th Street. Todd Heisler/The New York Times

One of Broadway's oldest surviving theaters is now its youngest.

When the Hudson Theater reopens on Saturday, Feb. 11 — with Jake Gyllenhaal adding star power to the revival of “Sunday in the Park With George” — it becomes Broadway's 41st and newest playhouse, 114 years after it became one of Broadway's first. (It opened with a production of “Cousin Kate” starring Ethel Barrymore.) Located on 44th Street just east of Broadway, the ornate theater has led a life as various as Manhattan itself, with stints as a TV studio (1950s), a reborn legit theater and then a porn palace ('60s), a rock venue ('80s), and, for the last 20 years, an event space for Millennium Hotels.

Then there was the Andy Warhol moment, coinciding with his 1967 movie “Bike Boy.” As The New York Times put it in a review: “It opened yesterday at the Hudson Theater. It belongs in the Hudson River.”

Today, however, after a renovation by the Ambassador Theater Group of Britain that was estimated to run \$10 million before it started, the Hudson is ready to be a showplace again, and in turn to become that New York rarity: a new Broadway house. (Ambassador officials declined to provide the final cost.)

“The charm and the beauty, historically and architecturally, that has been sitting there still shines today,” said Eric Paris, the theater’s general manager.

## Then: A History of the Hudson



Wisconsin Historical Society

### **The Titanic, then the Depression**

The theater was built by Henry B. Harris, above left, who ran it until 1912, when he perished on the Titanic. His wife, Renée, also above, survived and returned to New York to operate the theater. She became one of Broadway’s first female producers. (She lost it to foreclosure in the Depression.)



Geo. P. Hall & Son/The New-York Historical Society, via Getty Images

### Eventually, a Landmark

The Hudson features a Beaux-Arts exterior with a gray brick-and-limestone facade. This photograph shows the modest marquee with the name of the actor Henry Miller, who appeared in some of the theater's earliest productions. In 1987, the Hudson was designated a landmark building.



Associated Press

### The King When He Was a Prince

In 1934, the theater was leased to CBS, which used it for a short time as a radio studio. It became a Shubert-managed theater for a few years, but NBC bought the space in 1950 and turned it into a television studio. One of the most famous performers to play at the Hudson when it was a TV studio was Elvis Presley, far right, shown here with Steve Allen and Imogene Coca in 1956.



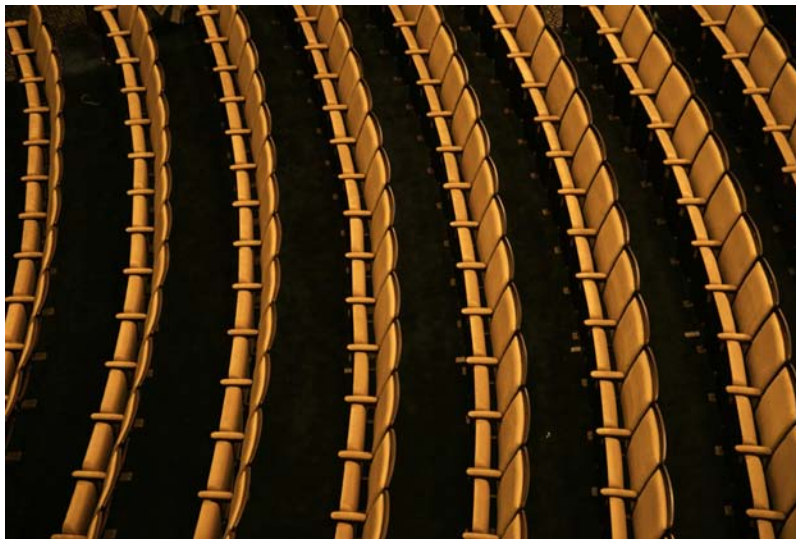
From left, Irene Worth, Jason Robards Jr. and Maureen Stapleton in Lillian Hellman's "Toys in the Attic" at the Hudson Theater in 1960. Photofest

### **Classics, Hits, Flops**

Lillian Hellman's final drama, "Toys in the Attic" (1960), starred Jason Robards Jr., above center, and Maureen Stapleton, above right (with Irene Worth), in a tale of an emotionally brutal family. It ran for 456 performances and was nominated for a Tony for best play. Other notable shows to play the Hudson included Shaw's "Man and Superman" and Sean O'Casey's "The Plough and the Stars." The final play there was less celebrated: "Mike Downstairs" closed in April 1968 after 11 previews and four performances.

### **Now: The Restoration Hardware**

George Couyas's restoration brings out the golds and bronzes of the original theater, with gold seat cushions — not the usual red — matching the color scheme. Among the highlights:



Todd Heisler/The New York Times

**Brand-new seats, of dark mahogany, were made by a British company, Kirwin & Simpson. They're 23-inches wide, far roomier than standard Broadway seats, which can be as small as 17-inches wide.**



Todd Heisler/The New York Times

**One section of the lobby is accentuated by domes with original Tiffany glass.**





Todd Heisler/The New York Times

**Most of the restored mosaic work is original and has been in the theater “since Tiffany himself brought it in,” as Mr. Paris put it. Tiles are butternut gold, pink, turquoise and several shades of green.**



Todd Heisler/The New York Times

**The newly gilded box office is almost untouched from its original form.**



Todd Heisler/The New York Times

**The floret-accented coffers in the box-office lobby once held light bulbs. They were removed for energy efficiency and replaced with a chandelier.**



Todd Heisler/The New York Times

**The Axminster hand-woven carpet features a pattern reflecting the hexagonal motifs throughout the theater.**

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