

WORLD VIEW: Melbourne's arts patrons are in for a feast of international performances next year.  
ROBIN USHER **ARTS PAGE 13**



Comfort and joy: Arts Centre Melbourne chief executive Judith Isherwood with Hamer Hall's new seats.

PICTURE: RODGER CUMMINS

## Sound investment in comfort is a weighty part of hall redesign

By **ROBIN USHER**

NEW SEATS cost only a fraction of the \$128.5 million being spent on the renovation of Hamer Hall but the Arts Centre Melbourne's chief executive, Judith Isherwood, is convinced they play a crucial role in determining the impact of a performance.

"Everyone has an opinion," she said yesterday in unveiling the 2640 burnished orange seats with wooden frames being installed at a cost of \$2 million before July's reopening of the hall after two years of work.

"The challenge is to find a comfortable design that fits the aesthetic and acoustic demands of the refurbished hall," she said. "These are modern, wider and more comfortable than the 30-year-old seats they replace."

Ms Isherwood said the brushed velvet seats would add warmth and vibrancy, especially after modern lighting is installed "to bring the auditorium to life".

Spanish company Figueras, which she said was one of the world's finest builders of concert-hall seating, won the contract from a shortlist of six overseas firms. No Australian company had the expertise required because here the focus is on stadium seating.

The Arts Centre is careful not to be compared with the Melbourne Recital Centre, whose seating, not supplied by Figueras, attracted some complaints after it opened in 2009.

**¶ The original seats no longer added celebration to the room. ¶**

JUDITH ISHERWOOD, Arts Centre CEO

The company was contracted last December and spent the next three months completing the final design in consultation with the renovation architects, Ashton Raggatt McDougall, and Marshall Day acousticians.

The redevelopment project

director, Tony Murphy, said big advances in acoustic modelling made designing the seats more efficient.

"You can measure the impact the seating has on the sound — not just the padding, but the overall size and shape," he said. "The original seats were small, somewhat dour, and while part of the overall look, no longer added celebration to the room."

There are 40 fewer seats in the renovated hall because of acoustic improvements during the renovations. The walls have been moved in three metres on each side, causing the loss of some seats, with others removed on the sides of the balcony to improve the sound distribution.

A special render has been applied to the walls to improve the acoustics and a new "technical zone" is being installed above the stage that will also serve as acoustic reflectors.

**ARTS**

▶ Touring program **PAGE 13**

Judith Isherwood, directora del Hamer Hall de Melbourne, comparte con la prensa australiana su satisfacción por el servicio de consultoría y el resultado final de las butacas Figueras.

Arts Centre Melbourne's chief executive Judith Isherwood tells the Australian press about her satisfaction with the consulting service provided by Figueras and the final result achieved with the seating.