SANDY BROWN

West Downs Centre
University of Winchester

Complete	Area	Client	Architect
2020	UK England	University of Winchester	Design Engine Architects

The University of Winchester's West Downs Centre serves as a formal entrance and gateway to their West Downs campus, providing new teaching and learning facilities for computer and digital related degree programmes. The £30m development has increased the university's capacity by twenty percent and also serves as a gateway to the City of Winchester.

The building's main 4-storey teaching block houses the digital technologies department with a range of teaching rooms, social learning spaces, café, food hall and public gallery. The building's two wings to the front frame the main entrance and garden, one housing a 250-seat auditorium in a cylindrically shaped structure, and the other housing a light and airy library space over two floors.

One key area for acoustics is a contemplation space providing a quiet meditative area away from the usual bustle of university life. The challenge was to provide a space that both remained connected to the outside world and rest of the building while still allowing a place for retreat and privacy for meditation and yoga classes. A combination of strategically placed timber screens and sound absorbing finishes help to achieve this, as well as the walls having recessed spaces where people can 'retreat' to study, rest or concentrate. The space is part of a series of key elements including a tranquillity garden which contribute to the building's WELL Certification.

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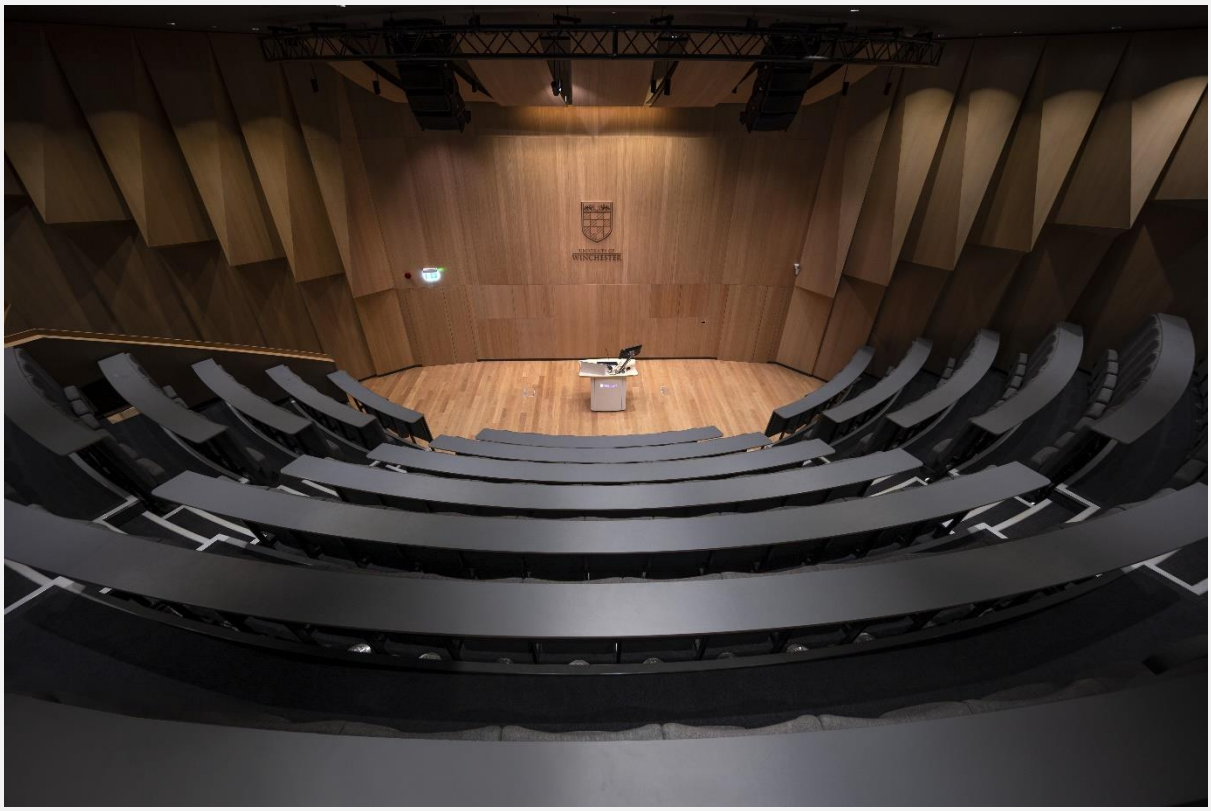
The main acoustic challenge was the 250-seat auditorium located within the building's circular 'drum' wing. The space's primary function is as a large lecture space, using its wide and shallow shape to ensure no one is very far from the presenter. Late in the design, the client asked for the space to be adapted to allow occasional music performance, for which the wide shape was not optimum. To help accommodate this, sound absorbing finishes to the concave back wall were removed in favour of very deep sound diffusing panels, which worked to remove any focusing effects while allowing the reverberation time to be slightly higher for music uses. Scallop shaping was added to the side walls to provide more lateral sound reflections and enhance the acoustics for musical performances.



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