

Theatre Projects mourns loss of founder, industry trailblazer Richard Pilbrow

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[Richard Pilbrow](#) (1933-2023), our friend and founder, passed away the evening of December 6, 2023. Richard was a vital force in the theatre—a celebrated Broadway and West End lighting designer, a pathfinder in the theatrical consulting profession, and an innovator in countless other corners of the industry. He lived a life committed to expansive thinking and supporting others, co-founding multiple professional membership organizations and serving as mentor to consultants and designers across the globe. And his books on lighting and on his career in consultancy have become standard reads for fledgling creatives and industry professionals alike.

We join many in mourning Richard at this time. His influence across our industry, within our company, and at an individual level was deeply felt, and his energy and compassion will be missed. Richard created and embodied the spirit of Theatre Projects—demonstrating values like inclusion, innovation, community-centric thinking, kindness—and directed the company’s course, time and again, as our industry and our scope of services changed. Even after Richard’s retirement, he stayed close with team members and remained a committed advocate for the arts; our work will forever benefit from his passion.

I met Richard in the winter of 1997; we were introduced by a mutual friend. I had his Stage Lighting book, so I knew who he was, but I had never met him in person. I came up to the office (in Ridgely in those days) to chat, get the tour, and meet the staff. At the end of almost three hours, he said that he didn’t have any positions to offer me but would keep in touch. About four months later I got a call offering me a position. In hindsight I cannot imagine working for (and with) anyone else in this industry. He opened my eyes to what is important in what we do and gave me a whole second career that I never could have imagined. I will be forever

grateful for his guidance, patience, sense of humor, and insight into not only why live theatre is vital, but how to best present it so that audience and performer alike are elevated.

David H. Rosenberg, Theatre Projects director

Richard was born to a music teacher, Marjorie, and an Olympic fencer, Gordon, in Beckenham, UK. From an early age, he was producing, designing, and starring in small productions with family and friends, drawing influence from performances at the New Theatre in London and his time with the Beckenham Children's Theatre. After serving as a corporal in the RAF, Richard continued his theatrical training with the Central School of Speech and Drama and soon began working in a variety of roles for amateur theatre productions. He eventually found his way into professional theatre as a stage manager at Her Majesty's, and things failed to slow up from that point forward.

Richard started his own venture, Theatre Projects Limited, in 1957, renting out lights salvaged from under the stage at Drury Lane and working as a designer-for-hire. His company would go on to help shape the profession of "theatrical consultant" and to plan and design hundreds of preeminent global performance venues.

Under Richard's leadership, Theatre Projects was at times a lighting house, a sound studio, a film and Broadway producer, a planning and design consultancy, an architectural lighting firm, and almost anything else that supported the management and construction of creative spaces. His contagious ambition and willingness to experiment kept the company shifting, expanding, retracting, and restructuring over the years, and his mentees and colleagues often went on to successful design careers or to found their own theatrical consultancies.

Richard's landmark venues with Theatre Projects include [the National Theatre](#) (London, UK), [Portland's Centers for the Arts](#), [the Walt Disney Concert Hall](#) (Los Angeles, USA), [the New Amsterdam Theatre](#) (New York, USA), [Steppenwolf Theatre](#) (Chicago, USA), [the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts](#) (Orlando, USA), [the Dallas Arts District](#) (including [the AT&T Performing Arts Center's Winspear Opera House](#) and [Wily Theatre](#)), [the New World Center](#) (Miami Beach, USA), [the Kimmel Center](#) (Philadelphia, USA), and [the Glyndebourne](#) (Lewes, UK).

In his communal spirit and generosity, Richard always acknowledged the people that he worked with. Richard was an earnest collaborator his entire life and at the highest level.

Michael Nishball, Theatre Projects principal

Outside of consulting, Richard lit shows on Broadway and the West End, earning him Tony nominations, a Drama Desk award, an Outer Critics award, and multiple lifetime achievement awards. His design of *Zorba* marked the first time a Broadway musical had an English lighting designer, and along with Robert Ornbo, he became one of the first English designers invited to join the United Scenic Artists.

Richard was a co-founder of the Association of Lighting Designers, the Association of British Theatre Technicians, the Institute of British Theatre Consultants, and the Society of British Theatre Designers. He also frequently spoke or held leadership positions at other esteemed education and industry institutions.

We celebrate his legacy and send our best to everyone who knew Richard. And for those who didn't, we hope this shares a glimpse at his accomplishments and character. Remembrances can be shared through an online form available at bit.ly/RememberingRichard.