

# FAST COMPANY

## [Why New York's iconic Palace Theatre is being raised 30 feet off the ground](#)

*It's a masterful feat of engineering, and will unlock 15,000 square feet of ground-floor retail.*

Elissaveta Brandon, 1.14.22



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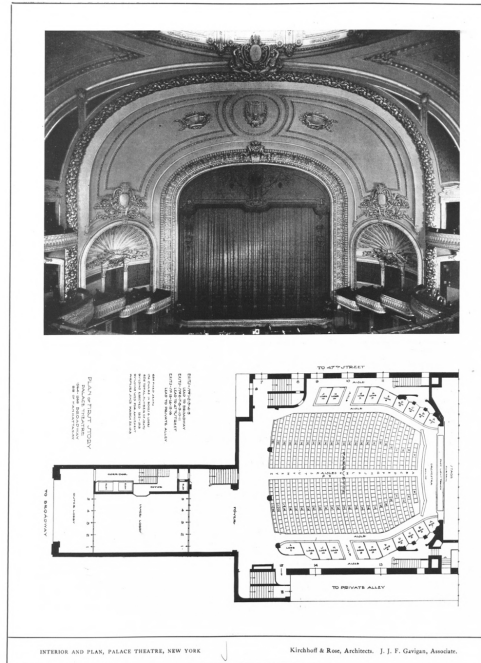
If you happen to pass through Times Square in the next few weeks, you may notice a sky-blue sign on the corner of 7th Avenue and 47th Street that reads "Raising the Palace Theatre." This isn't a metaphor. One of Broadway's oldest theaters is literally being raised off the ground.



The Palace Theatre was built in 1913, with a glorious beaux arts interior by Milwaukee architects Kirchoff & Rose. Now, in a masterful feat of engineering that seems to defy gravity, the 40,000-square-foot building is being lifted 30 feet above the ground. The building, which weighs about 7,000 tons, is a little over 3 inches into its ascent. But when it reaches its full height, it will eventually slot into the TSX development—a \$2.5-billion superstructure currently under construction. Why, you ask? To unlock 15,000 square feet of ground-floor retail and entertainment space in one of the world’s busiest tourist attractions.



In 2019, the TSX Broadway tower broke ground to much fanfare, promising 46 stories of maximalist retail, LED-laden facades fit for the spectacle that is Times Square, and a sweeping outdoor stage separate from the Palace Theatre in front of the plaza’s famous red steps. The project won’t be complete until early 2023, but last week marked an important milestone: The Palace Theatre began its ascent.



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This isn't the first time that an entire building has been moved. Last year, a 139-year-old Victorian building in San Francisco was picked up and wheeled away on giant dollies, six blocks away from its original location. And in 2020, an 85-year-old primary school building in Shanghai "walked" to its new location on 200 robotic legs.

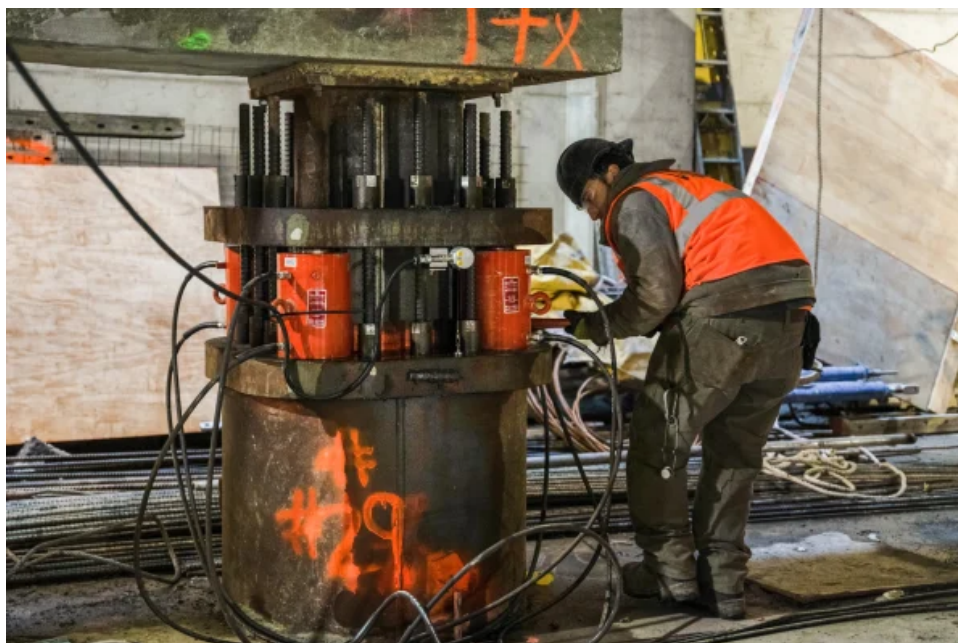
"When you're lifting a Broadway theater, you better have a good reason for it," says David Orowitz, managing director at L&L Holding Co., the building's developer. "Location is that reason."

In 2019—before the pandemic rendered an otherwise swarming corner of Manhattan still—Times Square saw about 373,000 pedestrians a day. (Numbers are picking back up, but foot traffic is still 44% below 2019 levels.) And as of 2013, 22 cents out of every dollar spent by visitors in New York City was spent in Times Square.





The Palace Theatre was designated an interior landmark in 1987. (Its facade was lost long ago, but its grandiose interior remains.) Thanks to a complex mechanism involving hydraulic jacks, a new truss and a concrete ring built around the edge of the theater, the entire structure was disconnected from its foundation and is now being raised on a platform. When it reaches the equivalent of the building's third floor, it will be secured in place with so-called super-columns and poured concrete slabs. "We'll need to connect the new building to the old structure," Orowitz says, "but you won't notice that when inside the building."



To access the theater, you will have to go around the corner to 47th Street (previously, visitors would access it from 7th Avenue). There, a new marquee will usher you in toward a pair of large escalators that will take you up to the third floor, where you will be welcomed by a generous new lobby. “We’re going to have architecture that takes into consideration what the theater box looks like and introduces a modern interpretation of that,” Orowitz says.



As for the theater’s beaux arts interior, its gold-leaf gilding, ornate plasterwork, and sumptuous dome will be restored by local firm PBDW Architects. “These theaters were built really well, but 100 years is a long time,” Orowitz says. “We’re taking this to the glory it originally had.”