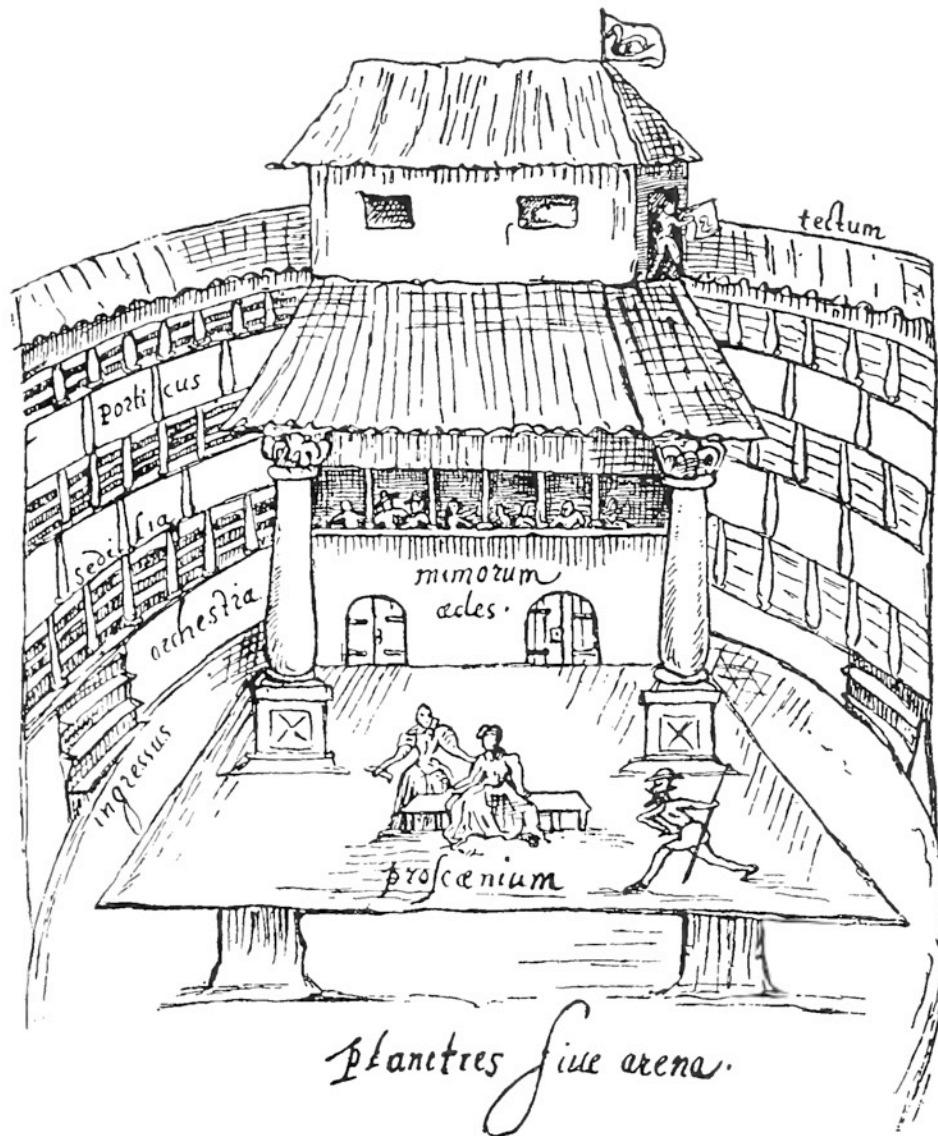


MAP OF LONDON PLAYHOUSES

This map shows some of the primary playhouses active during Shakespeare's career. Note that the public playhouses — the large outdoor amphitheatres — are outside the city of London proper: far to the north of the city and on the south bank of the Thames River.

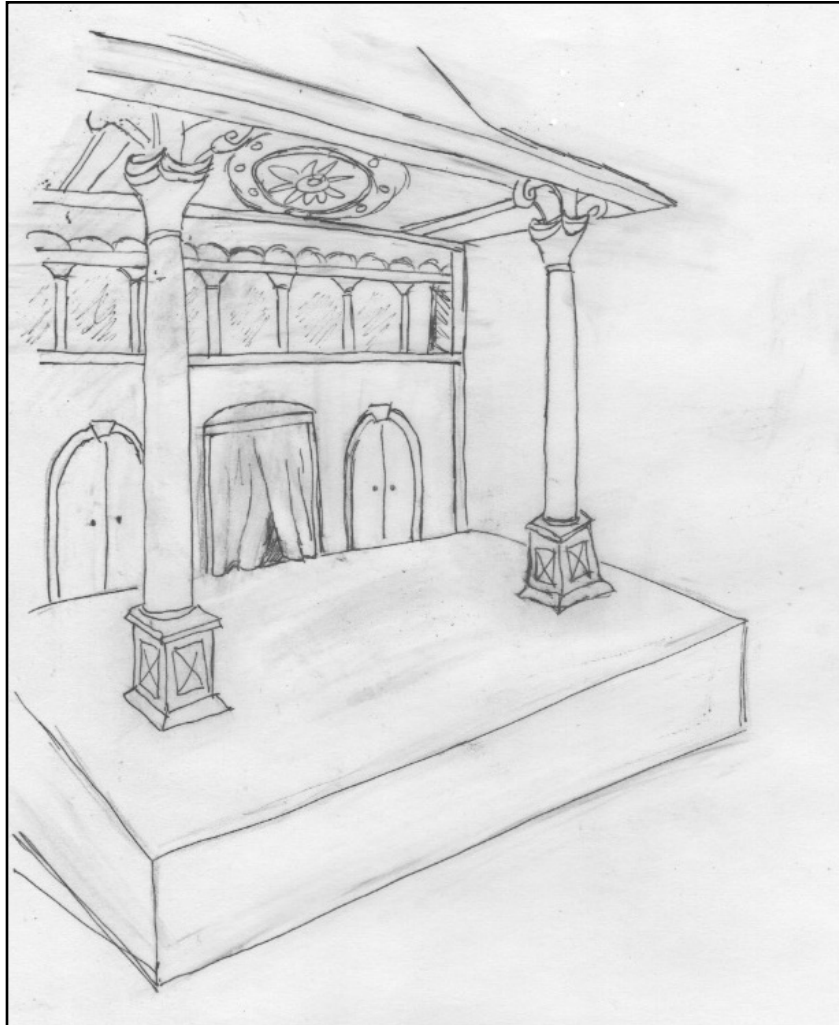


SKETCH OF THE SWAN THEATER

This drawing is the only known contemporary sketch of an Elizabethan playhouse. It is a copy of a sketch that Johannes de Witt made of the Swan Theater in 1596. De Witt included the original drawing in a letter to his friend Arend van Buchell, who copied it into his diary.

The Elizabethan theater had no “sets” or scenery changes; every scene played out on the same simple stage. This uniform staging encouraged a quick, lively pace to the performances and forced the audience to listen carefully for dialogue cues about the location of a scene.

While the stage was minimalist, the costumes were elaborate, expensive, and eye catching. Contemporary accounts of playgoing in London invariably mention the gorgeous costumes, and Puritans denounced the “lust exciting apparel” on display in the theaters.



THE ELIZABETHAN STAGE

This sketch shows the basic layout of an Elizabethan amphitheater like the Globe.

The stage is a platform, about five feet high, connected to a backstage area and extending outward, with the audience on three sides. Such a “thrust stage” creates greater intimacy than a proscenium stage.

Two pillars support a roof over the stage, protecting the actors from sun or rain.

On the back wall is a central discovery space, a curtained alcove that could open to reveal (or “discover”) something, like Juliet in her tomb.

The two doors flanking the discovery space lead backstage (which the Elizabethans called the “tiring house” — the attiring or dressing rooms). Actors would exit and enter through these doors.

Above the main stage is the upper stage or gallery. Actors would “enter above” here, like Juliet on her balcony. Wealthy playgoers could buy a seat in the gallery.

The stage also typically included a trapdoor used for various stage effects. They might, for example, have raised and lowered the Witches’ cauldron in *Macbeth* through the trapdoor.

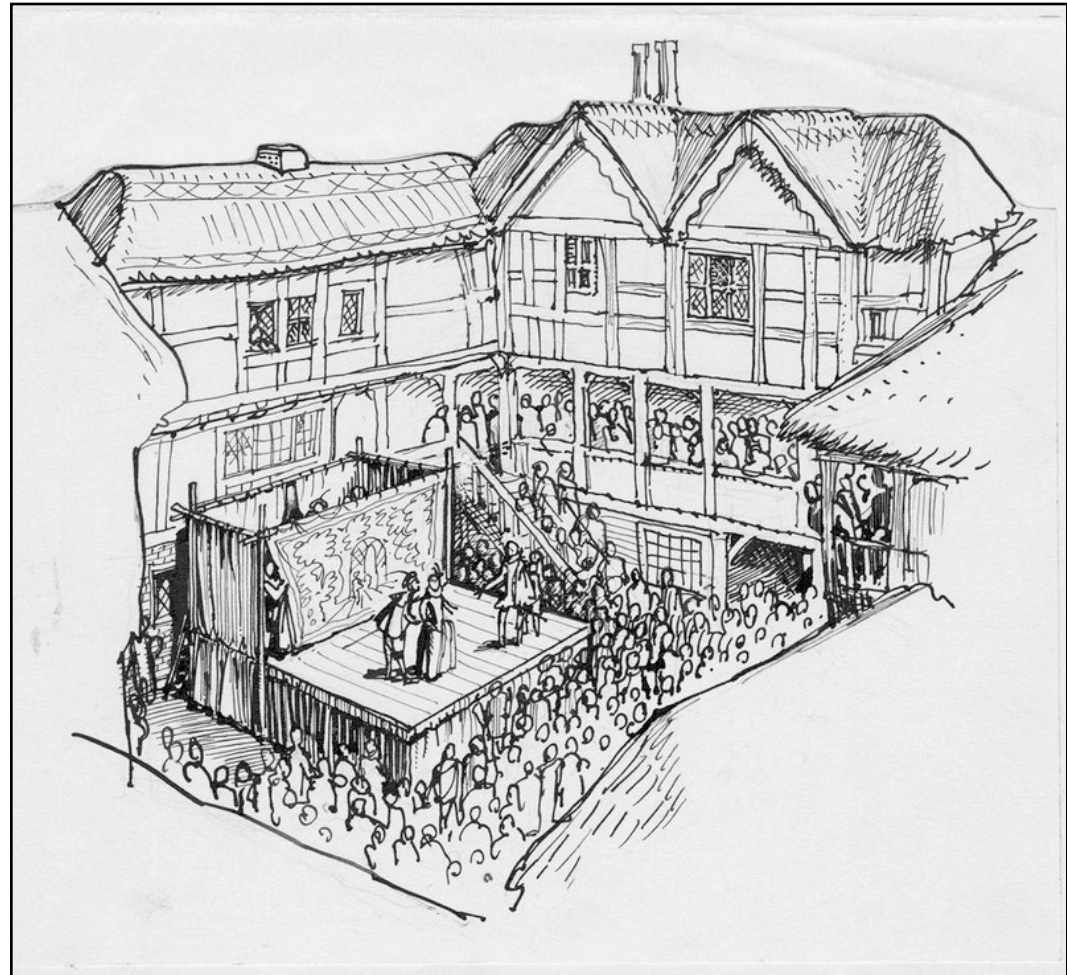
INN YARD STAGES

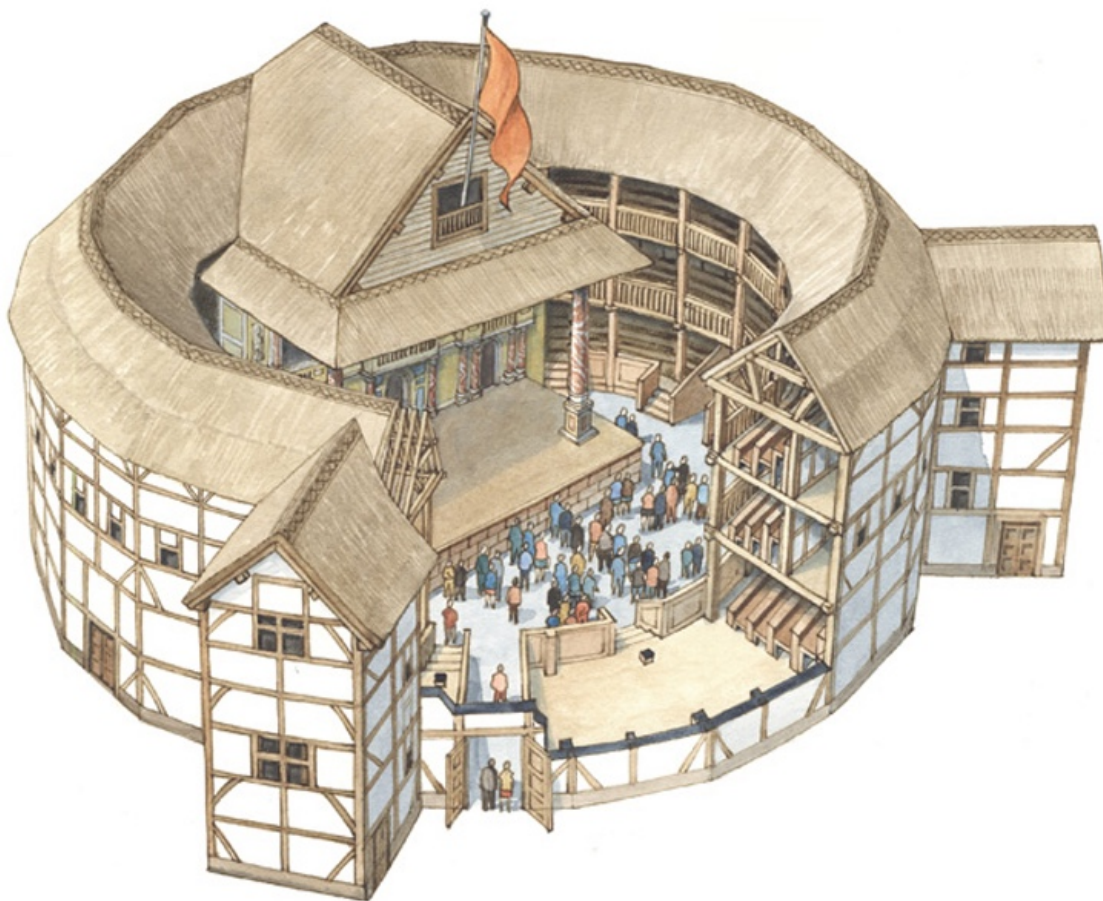
In 1584, the City of London licensed four inns for dramatic performance. They were all existing taverns permitted to stage plays, not exclusively playhouses.

This drawing by C. Walter Hodges depicts how such courtyard theaters might have looked.

Queen Elizabeth's Privy Council banned all playhouses within London in 1594. So only playhouses outside the city limits — like the Theatre or the Rose — could legally stage plays.

The simplicity and flexibility of the Elizabethan stage made it practical to perform in an inn yard and would have allowed touring companies to set up in readily available locations — like town halls or local inns.



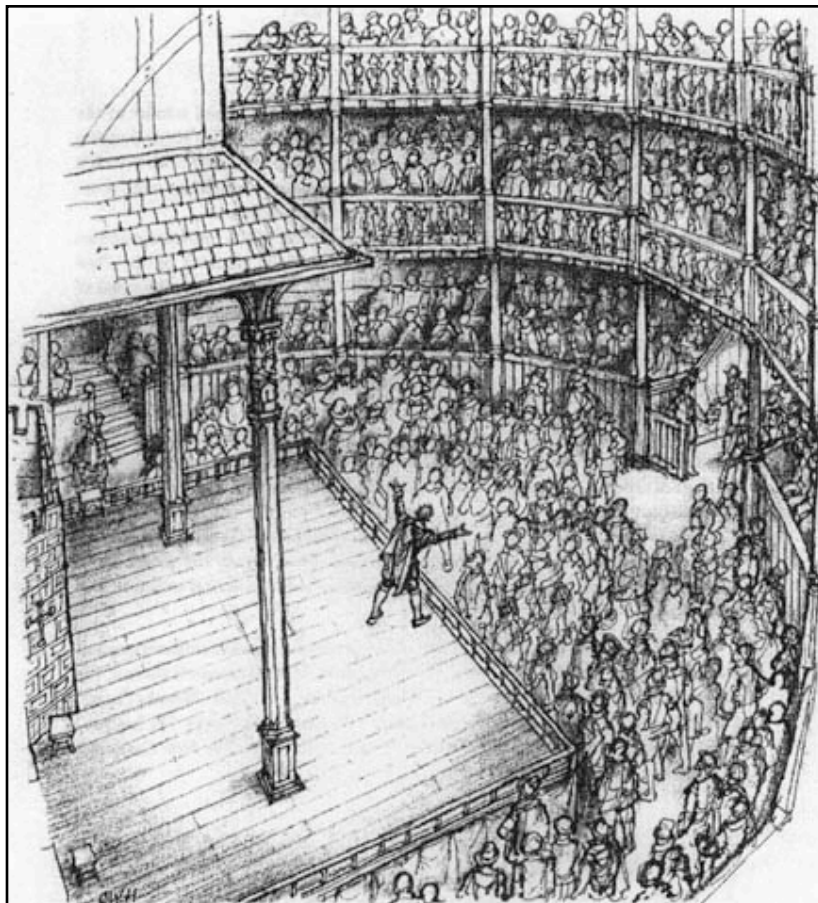


PUBLIC PLAYHOUSE — CUTAWAY

This drawing shows the structure of a public playhouse: a three-story doughnut with seats on each level and a standing audience in the yard around the stage.

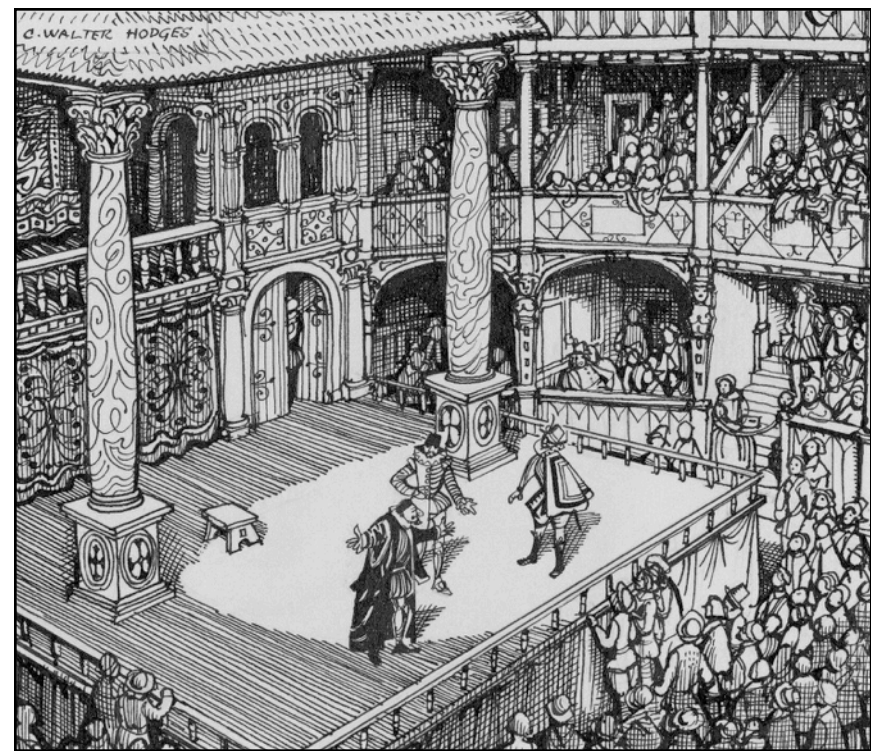
The standing audience, or “groundlings,” paid one penny for admission. For twopence, you could sit on the benches in the galleries; a cushioned seat would cost threepence. Wealthy playgoers paid sixpence, for a seat in the galleries on the upper stage.

A playhouse would raise its flag to let everyone know they would perform a play that day. Performances started around 2:00 PM and ran, without intermission, for about two hours.



PERFORMING AT THE GLOBE

Here are two sketches by C. Walter Hodges that depict conjectural performances at the Globe Theater.



SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE

Shakespeare's Globe is a modern reconstruction of the Globe theater built just a few hundred yards from the original site in the London Borough of Southwark. It opened in 1997 with a performance of *Henry V*.

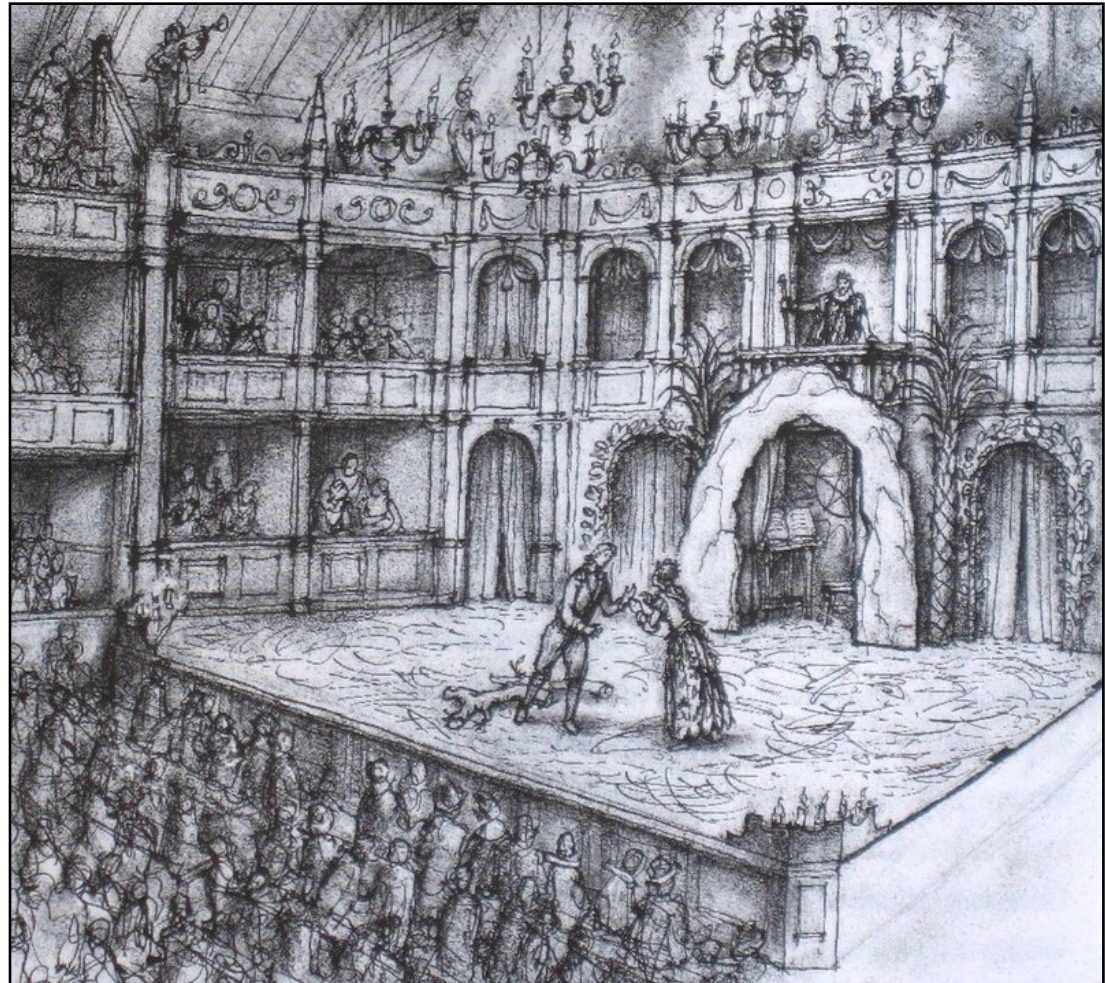


THE BLACKFRIARS

In 1596 the Lord Chamberlain's Men leased the Blackfriars — a private indoor theater in London. But protests from the locals prevented them from performing there, so they rented it out to a Boy's company. In 1609 the company — now the King's Men — finally began performing regularly at the Blackfriars.

This sketch by C. Walter Hodges presents a possible staging of a scene from *The Tempest*, a play Shakespeare probably wrote with performance at the Blackfriars in mind.

Note the candles at the corners of the stage and in the chandeliers. The acting companies may have taken breaks between Acts to trim and replace candles during the performance.





BLACKFRIARS RECONSTRUCTION

The American Shakespeare Center built a reconstruction of the Blackfriars in Stanton, Virginia. The 300-seat theater opened in 2001 with a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Private hall theaters shared the same basic layout as the public amphitheaters: a thrust stage, two stage doors for exits and entrances, a central “discovery space,” and an upper stage gallery.

Since hall theaters like the Blackfriars were smaller than the outdoor amphitheaters and catered to a more elite clientele, their admission prices were much higher than those at the Globe.

THE BLACKFRIARS PLAYHOUSE

The American Shakespeare Center tries to replicate the experiences of Elizabethan playgoers by following the basic principles of Renaissance theatrical production, such as Universal Lighting (audience and actors share the same pool of light), Doubling (one actor playing multiple roles in a show), cross-gender casting (men playing female characters and vice versa), and Minimal Sets.

