

Ten days until Hidden Door Festival begins

It is ten days until Hidden Door Festival 2023 starts in one of the biggest buildings that they have yet taken over, although they are not using all of the 26,800 square metres. Now would be a good time to buy a ticket.

This year's music, art, spoken word and everything else that makes up this special Edinburgh festival runs from 31 May to 4 June and there will be a lot to enjoy. It will take place at the former Scottish Widows HQ which was completed in 1976 and is a very unusual hexagonal shaped site with both indoor and outdoor spaces.

Today the volunteers who make it happen were in the building creating new spaces where the various parts of the festival will take place.



Hazel Johnson Festival Director of Hidden Door talked to us about the event which begins on 31 May 2023 PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

We spoke to Festival Manager, Hazel Johnson, about the way to get in, and what you can expect when you get there. She said: “The main entrance will be off Holyrood Park Road, and there’ll be signs pointing in that direction with the main entrance through some double gates,

“One of the quirks of this building is that parts of it are on stilts. So you think you’re on the ground floor, and you’re sort of on the ground floor, and also sort of on the first floor. So you come in at what is technically basement level, and then the main entrance will lead you up through the building either to some of the music spaces if that is where you want to go first, or to the Environments projects, which are a new thing we’re doing this year. Building on the creative collaborations from previous years, we’ve got some

really exciting, site specific performances that we're calling the Environments.

"The idea is that you go through this – I don't want to give too much away, but will give you a flavour of it – this sort of Portal, where you have sort of an introduction to what the Environments will be. And then you go into an unknown space, and the performances will wake up as the audience travels through. So the performances will take place as a rolling programme. And in this dark space, things will come alive for you to discover.

"We are encouraging people to get down early to do this – the Environments will take around about 90 minutes to experience in full. So you want to leave plenty of time for that as they are quite special.

"As with all Hidden Door festivals, we've got all the stuff that you'd expect the music and all the bars and the visual art tucked away. Food's really important. We have some amazing street vendors this year."

During our visit the former canteen area was in the early stages of being converted to a Cabaret Stage.

Hazel continued: "So we're thinking opulent, I mean, it's a huge space. It's one of those wonderful canteen spaces that was used when the office was in use. We've got a lot of people have come to volunteer for us, actually, who have said, "Oh, I used to work here, I used to have my lunch down there". Apparently they did a really good soup and sandwich offer.

"But we're going to be transforming that into a live music stage, called the Cabaret Stage. And there'll be a bar there, the Cabaret bar, with chairs and tables, so it's going to be a great place to hang out. And that will be open until one o'clock in the morning."

Everyone at Hidden Door is a volunteer, some of whom only come

on board at the last minute during the build. And Hazel said they need more volunteers right now. So if you have a spare few hours then do go along and sign up to do some sweeping or sign painting or whatever is needing done that day.

There were about 50 volunteers on site all with an individual job to do like painting signs, or working in teams to clear out the pond around the former office block. Looking around there were some artefacts which had clearly come from other festivals and Hazel said that they are helped enormously by the International Festival or the Book Festival just offering stuff which might be useful from their stores.

As their main income is from ticket and bar sales Hazel said: "If people come down to experience Hidden Door then that gives us less sleepless night so get your tickets, please!"

Tickets are available [here](#)

The future of the listed building

Scottish Widows finally moved out of the offices in 2020. The current building is a category A-listed, modern Expressionist style, reinforced concrete, modular office by Sir Basil Spence, Glover and Ferguson built between 1972 and 1976. The structure comprises a cluster of 12 interlocking hexagonal blocks ranging from one to four storeys in height, with a basement and sub-basement, with continuous curtain wall glazing formed in brown solar glass within bronzed metal frames.

The open-plan layout follows the 'Burolandschaft' concept which evolved in German office architecture in the 1950s and 1960s and the hexagonal modular layout was influenced by the BP-Haus headquarters in Hamburg, although the dolerite formations of Salisbury Crags could also have inspired the design. The gardens and landscaping with the reflecting pools

were attributed to landscape architect and garden designer, Dame Sylvia Crowe. Even the car park had a planted roof.

[Plans were revealed](#) in May 2022 for a mixed use development including proposals to demolish some of the hexagons making up the 1970s office complex with the remaining hexagonal shaped parts retained for offices. There were public consultation events held last summer.

The developers originally wanted to build 194 flats on the site with 35 per cent, or 68 affordable homes. The plans were then submitted to The City of Edinburgh Council in September 2022 with amendments to the height of the residential blocks, and a reduction in number to 174 homes. The decision is due on 24 May 2023, and the Chief Planning Officer is recommending approval subject to legal agreement.



Celeste, Hidden Door 2023. Photo © 2023 Martin P. McAdam
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Creative Director David Martin, Hidden Door 2023. Photo © 2023 Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com



Volunteers Matthew, Caitlin, Layla. Hidden Door 2023. Photo © 2023 Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com



Ciaran Cannon, Hidden Door 2023. Photo © 2023 Martin P. McAdam
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Esther. Hidden Door 2023. Photo © 2023 Martin P. McAdam
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Rob. Hidden Door 2023.. Photo © 2023 Martin P. McAdam
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Alice Sherlock. Photo © 2023 Martin P. McAdam
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Alice Sherlock. "You can't go round chucking spuds at boats".
Hidden Door 2023. Photo © 2023 Martin P. McAdam



Matt. Hidden Door 2023. Photo © 2023 Martin P. McAdam
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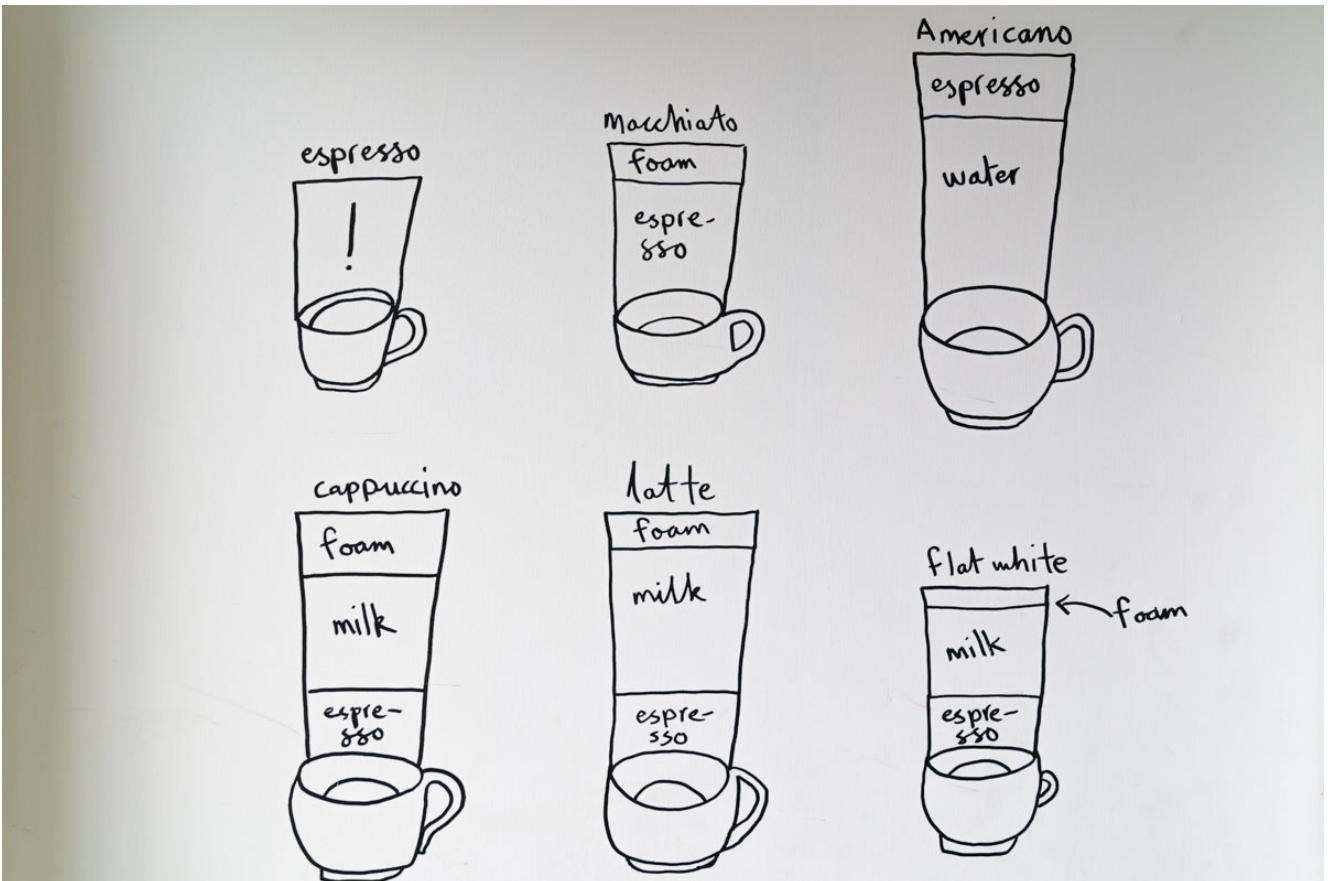
Reggie. Hidden Door 2023. Photo © 2023 Martin P. McAdam
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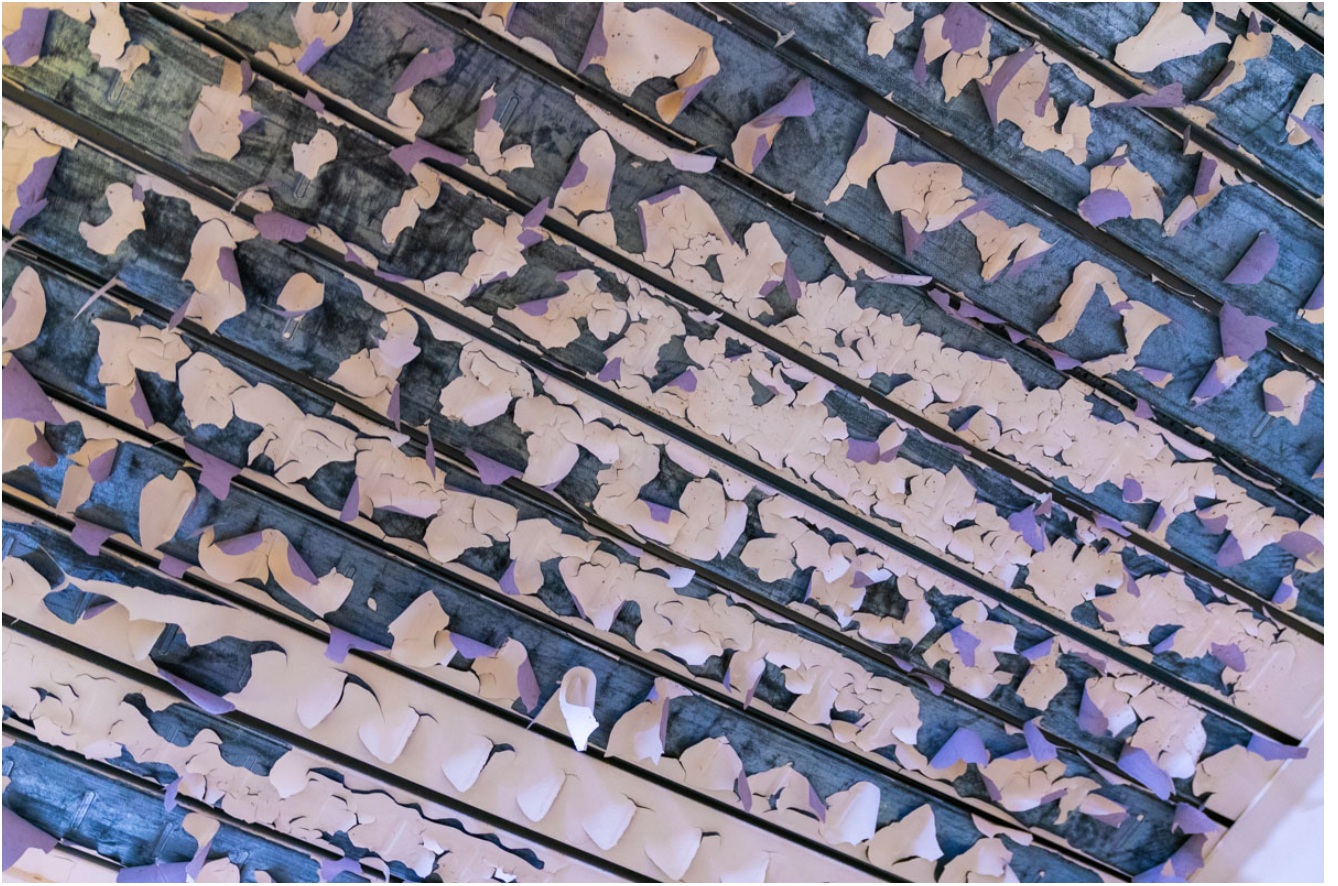


Eamonn. Hidden Door 2023. Photo © 2023 Martin P. McAdam
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W/C



ENVIRONMENTS
(CONTINUED)



STAGES



MORE ART



BOX OFFICE



WAY OUT



LOADING BAY
STAGE

POETRY STAGE

CLUB
(AFTER 10PM)

BAR



STAGES

FOOD



W/C



