



## Ted Ohl

The well-known co-founder of Pook, Diemont & Ohl discusses his recent decision to join the theatre consultancy Schuler Shook.

**Lighting&Sound America:** What drew you to the theatre?

**Ted Ohl:** I was a senior in high school and had never set foot on a stage. I wandered backstage and the drama teacher grabbed me, saying, "Are you mechanical at all?" I said, "Well, a little." And he said, "Great! You're going to do special effects for *Blithe Spirit!*" The next show was *Peter Pan* and he put me in charge of flying! I started in engineering at University of Colorado but spent all my time in the scene shop. I asked my counselor, "Is there any way to combine engineering and architecture and theatre?" He said, "No, they're completely different." I felt compelled to make a decision. And here I am now almost 50 years later designing theatres with Schuler Shook.

**LSA:** What was it like working on outdoor productions at Santa Fe Opera?

**TO:** I was technical director in 1978. The stage is open in the back to the Western sunset sky. At the end of *Tosca*, Tosca is standing on the parapet of the Castel Sant'Angelo and she leaps over the wall to kill herself. She jumped off the set, landing on a huge mattress, placed by apprentices. Of course, I was there to make sure it went well. Watching her come down, singing her last line, "O Scarpia, Avanti a Dio" and the orchestral score was swelling, I was looking up at the stars, not a roofed stagehouse. It was magical.

**LSA:** Can you describe your experience at Juilliard?

**TO:** At least when I was there, it was one of the rare places in New York City, where you could work as a theatre technician on elaborate productions if you didn't have a Local One card. Some very interesting people came through; everybody worked together so beautifully there.

**LSA:** How did you start Pook, Diemont & Ohl (PDO)?

**TO:** [At Juilliard], there were only a couple of salaried positions other than tech director and master electrician, so it was difficult to keep good people. Tony Diemont, Barbara Pook, and I were there and we figured out that if we could take on additional work, we could keep everybody together. PDO started by doing scenery, costumes, makeup, and production management. Eventually, we outgrew Juilliard; we continued for 30 years.

**LSA:** What prompted the merger with Texas Scenic?

**TO:** In the last three years, there had been major shifts in the industry, particularly on the stage rigging side; being in New York, we couldn't afford a large manufacturing space. We found in Texas Scenic a very good solution. It was also a terrific strategy, geographically. PDO was extremely strong from Boston through Washington [DC], and Texas Scenic very strong in the Southwest, up through DC. The merger made both companies stronger.

**LSA:** Why did you decide to join Schuler Shook and what will your job be like?

**TO:** Schuler Shook is the perfect combination of a lovely company with great people and a clear mission; opening an office here in New York gives me some autonomy, and also the ability to pursue a vocation I've always loved, which is the design of public assembly spaces.

**LSA:** How did the decision to open a New York office for Schuler Shook come about?

**TO:** I was drawn by their very clear mission, which is in three parts. The first is to support our existing clients in New York; Washington, DC; and the Northeast. The second is to increase the Schuler Shook presence in this market. I'm a business-development person as well as a designer. I'm also charged with working to broaden the overall markets for theatre planning and architectural lighting design. There's a market for broader concepts of theatre assembly, community, and face-to-face interactions. The possibilities are only limited by our imaginations.

**LSA:** How would you sum up your career so far?

**TO:** My career in New York has a quirky synergy. The first production I was responsible for in New York was in 1979 at Manhattan School of Music. This past year, I worked on the renovation of the Manhattan School of Music theatre. And the theatre consultant was Schuler Shook, whose New York office I now anchor. I've had a lot of really amazing mentors along the way. I really believe that you cannot have a career without guiding hands that have helped along the way and I've had a lot of them. ☺