# Barnaby Thompson leads £20 million revamp to future-proof Ealing Studios amid industry slump



Barnaby Thompson’s relationship with Ealing Studios began in an unusual way—with the filming of Victoria Beckham, then famously known as Posh Spice, being plunged underwater for the 1997 movie *Spice World*. That shoot marked Thompson’s first visit to the iconic west London film site, which is celebrated as the world’s oldest continuously operating film studio, founded in 1902. Now nearly three decades later, Thompson has transitioned from visitor and director to co-owner and visionary of its most significant overhaul in 80 years.

Ealing Studios holds an esteemed place in British cinema history, particularly noted for its golden era between the late 1930s and early 1950s, when it produced seminal comedies like *The Lavender Hill Mob*, *The Ladykillers*, and *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. After a period under BBC ownership that saw classics such as *Porridge*, *Monty Python*, and *Doctor Who* filmed there, the studios fell into a state of decline by the turn of the millennium. When Thompson and the Manhattan Loft Corporation acquired the complex for around £10 million, the studios were charming but dilapidated, untouched by significant investment since World War II.

Since taking ownership, Thompson has overseen a phased modernisation strategy, during which Ealing welcomed productions like *Downton Abbey*, *Darkest Hour*, and Amy Winehouse’s biopic *Back to Black*. However, to realise the full vision of blending its historic charm with cutting-edge facilities, a more substantial investment was needed. This arrived in 2022 when Starwood Capital, a US private equity firm, took a majority stake for £48.5 million, enabling a £20 million expansion initiative.

The refurbishment, now nearing completion, features a brand-new 1,300 square metre (approximately 14,000 square feet) sound stage—a net-zero carbon facility—boosting Ealing's total sound stage space by 60% to over 3,400 square metres. Alongside this, new production offices and modernised infrastructure respond to the demands of 21st-century filmmaking. Though Ealing is smaller than out-of-town competitors like Pinewood and Shepperton, its central London location and excellent transport links, including the Elizabeth line, provide easy access to Heathrow airport and the city centre. Thompson highlights the sustainability benefit of these links, noting that productions can minimise their carbon footprint by taking public transport rather than relying on lorries or cars.

This upgrade comes at a challenging juncture for the UK film and television industry. The period of redevelopment coincided with both the Hollywood actors’ and writers’ strikes and a significant market contraction following the end of "peak TV," the era defined by high-spending streaming services flooding the market. The British Film Institute reported a steep drop in film productions from 420 in 2022 to 191 in 2024, with premium TV shows costing at least £1 million per hour also declining from 248 to 191 in that timespan. Overall, the UK’s high-end production sector shrank by £2 billion, predominantly affecting television.

Thompson reflects that the timing of the studio’s closure for construction was fortunate given the strike-induced industry slowdown. He suggests that the streaming frenzy of previous years, which escalated costs unsustainably, has stabilised to more realistic production budgets, noting, “I think it is levelling out... There isn’t that streamer hysteria we had before.” Despite the market challenges, the revamped Ealing Studios is reportedly booked up well into mid-2026.

Another positive development came last year when the UK government introduced an enhanced tax credit for independent films with budgets up to £15 million, aimed at sustaining the production of distinctly British films—a sector where Thompson has long been passionate. He emphasises the importance of these incentives for financing films similar in scale to beloved UK successes such as *The King’s Speech* and *The Full Monty*. Yet, financial challenges remain; Ealing Studios reported pre-tax losses in both 2022 and 2023, reflecting the broader industry’s uncertainty.

For Thompson, who continues to work actively as a filmmaker, this modernisation of Ealing Studios is the culmination of a 25-year commitment to preserving and evolving a cultural landmark. He views himself not just as an owner but as a guardian of a studio deeply embedded in British cinematic heritage, recognising that the institution’s legacy extends far beyond him. His hope is that Ealing’s reinvention will maintain its historical prestige while positioning it firmly in the future of film and television production.

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* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-63786455)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson), [[4]](https://ealingstudios.com/about-ealing/history-3/), [[5]](https://www.britannica.com/money/Ealing-Studios)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-63786455), [[6]](https://ealingstudios.com/stages-production-spaces/overview/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-63786455), [[6]](https://ealingstudios.com/stages-production-spaces/overview/), [[7]](https://ealingstudios.com/about-ealing/creative-community/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson), [[4]](https://ealingstudios.com/about-ealing/history-3/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/jun/23/ealing-studios-revamp-barnaby-thompson> - This article discusses Barnaby Thompson's involvement in the £20 million revamp of Ealing Studios, aiming to modernise the historic facility while preserving its heritage. It highlights Thompson's long-standing connection to the studios, including his early work on 'Spice World' in 1997, and details the planned expansion, including a new 14,000-square-foot sound stage and additional office spaces. The piece also touches upon the challenges faced by the film industry, such as the impact of strikes and the rise of streaming services, and Thompson's vision for Ealing Studios' future.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-63786455> - This BBC News article reports on the £20 million redevelopment of Ealing Studios, focusing on the construction of a new 14,000-square-foot sound stage and additional facilities. The development aims to modernise the studios and make them more competitive in the evolving film industry. The article includes insights from Barnaby Thompson, co-owner of Ealing Studios, who emphasises the importance of the revamp in sustaining the studio's legacy and adapting to industry changes.
4. <https://ealingstudios.com/about-ealing/history-3/> - This page provides a comprehensive history of Ealing Studios, detailing its founding in 1902 by Will Barker and its evolution over the decades. It highlights the studio's golden age in the 1940s and 1950s, producing iconic films like 'The Ladykillers' and 'Kind Hearts and Coronets'. The page also covers the period when the BBC owned the studios, producing classics such as 'Porridge' and 'Doctor Who', and discusses the studio's modern era, including recent productions and ongoing developments.
5. <https://www.britannica.com/money/Ealing-Studios> - This Britannica article offers an overview of Ealing Studios, focusing on its role in British cinema. It discusses the studio's founding in 1929, its production of notable films during the 1930s and 1940s, and its association with the Ealing comedies. The article also covers the studio's ownership changes, including its acquisition by the BBC in 1955, and its subsequent productions in the post-war era.
6. <https://ealingstudios.com/stages-production-spaces/overview/> - This page outlines the facilities at Ealing Studios, detailing the five sound stages, including the new 14,000-square-foot net-zero carbon stage. It provides specifications for each stage and highlights the studio's modern production offices, workshops, and other facilities. The page also includes quotes from industry professionals praising the studio's heritage and facilities.
7. <https://ealingstudios.com/about-ealing/creative-community/> - This page highlights the creative community at Ealing Studios, mentioning notable productions such as 'Downton Abbey', 'The Durrells', and 'The Crown'. It emphasises the studio's role in hosting a diverse range of filmmakers, media companies, and educational institutions, fostering a collaborative environment for the film and television industry.