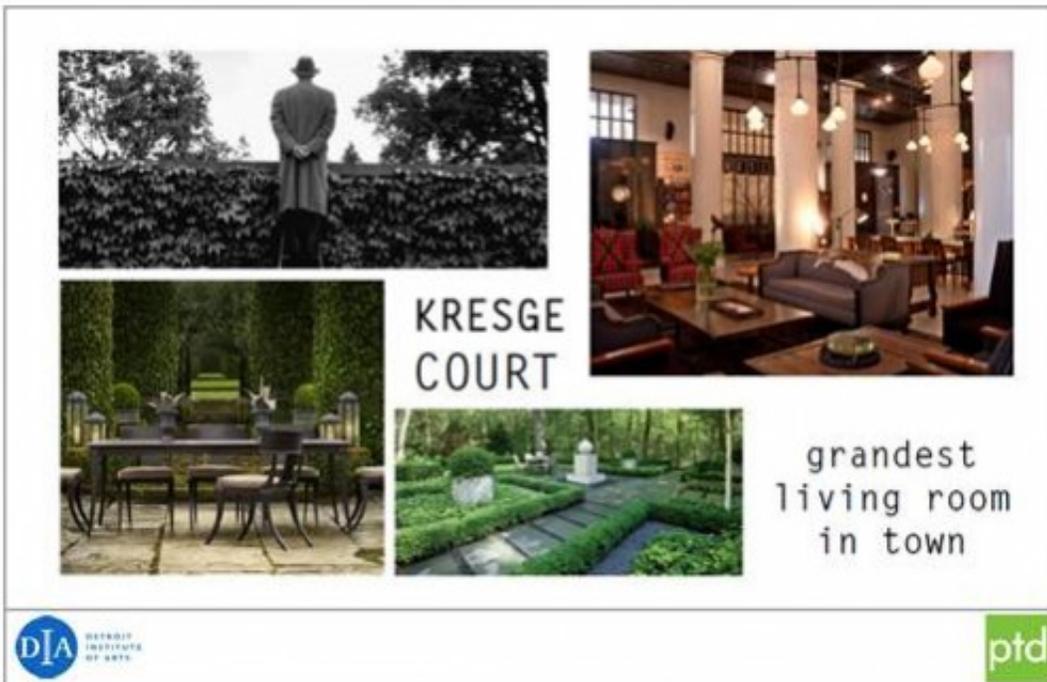


ARTPLACE

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Cultural Living Room

By ArtPlace
Detroit



Two iconic spaces at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) will offer innovative programming in conjunction with strategic partners in order to reposition the museum as an inspiring “third space” in Midtown to encourage creativity, exchange and connection for all Detroit residents.

Bradford Frost, Special Assistant for Community and Economic Development & Detroit Revitalization Fellow at DIA, spoke with ArtPlace about the challenges and rewards of this project:

ARTPLACE: What is the biggest risk you’ve taken in your efforts? How did you get burned, or how did you prevail?

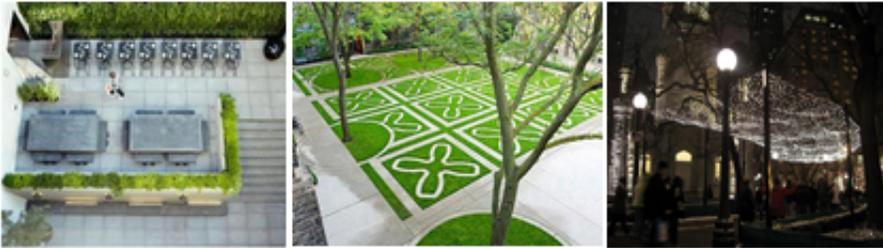
FROST: The leap of faith taken on a conceptual aspiration and a full design stage was the biggest risk all of us took—the DIA, ArtPlace, and our strategic partners—in the execution of the Cultural Living Room opportunity.

The Cultural Living Room is equal parts re-positioning statement, an internal change strategy, and transformative process to invite and reconnect local audiences to activate these extraordinary spaces. We want our local audiences and visitors to know that these are places design for their everyday use to relax, be inspired and connect with the museum in less formal and more intimate exchanges.

I'm not a designer, but during the process of moving from the ArtPlace application finalist stage last year to the full proposal, we reached out to dozens of experts and hosted almost daily sessions for two months with internal stakeholders on how the Cultural Living Room could be executed in the museum.

That effort prepared us for the design stage ahead as we discerned what changes would be made to our operations, rental program, programming, and a host of infrastructure impacts as well. Without procuring designers in advance, we were dependent on best case scenario planning and a commitment to match the ArtPlace investments with a domino strategy of in-kind support from partners like Midtown Detroit Inc., NBS Steelcase and Culture Source, to secure professional design resource experts, and a major capital investment from the museum that would only be leveraged through the ArtPlace opportunity.

So, it makes reasonable to see why we all took that leap. Also, design work is inspiration work. It takes time and vision and continuous engagement. Just look at the sources of inspiration from our designer, Patrick Thompson of Patrick Thompson Design for both Kresge Court and the South Lawn.



Intimate, connected, and inspiring

Patrick's vision emphasizes a mix of comfort blended with indoor and outdoor elements. It brings intimacy to large scale elements and reflect critically on the day to day utilization of the spaces. Now, when you take those shots, a diverse staff and the commitment to a partnership based project, it's easy to see how tight our time-table was for the design process.

While I wouldn't say we've been burned, the design process showed us two things we weren't fully prepared for when we submitted the final proposal. The first was that the procurement and build out phase for the new furniture plan went well beyond our initial assumptions, forcing us to rethink how a strategic integrated launch of the indoor and outdoor spaces would work best with the new timeline.

Second, we've naturally had some project scope expansion as museum has fully aligned to the Cultural Living Room opportunity. These changes range from board level policies regarding new rental agreements, to addressing an enhanced food service experience, to designing a new cultural concierge volunteer role, and technical expertise for infrastructure improvements like floor restoration, skylight repairs and other enhancements to Kresge Court. Each of these have added substantial time and thoughtful design for how the space will fully function to meet the tastes and needs of our visitors. It's added layers of engagement and compelled our highest leadership to take a much more vested role in the change process so that the forthcoming transformation of the court is as successful as possible.

The design phase also significantly ramped up the costs of the internal transformation, compelling us to consider how to execute the outdoor strategy faithfully to activate the lawn and add physical improvements but to accept that a more phased approach may be required taken with our outdoor efforts over the next couple years.

We're in the process of buttoning up the final design elements and investment choices now, so we'll have a complete picture of everything we'll be able to achieve over the next six months in just a few more weeks.

All that said it's clear that this risk will make an enormous impact on the museum and offer a significant change for our visitors and the local district when the transformation is complete.

What changes we've made to our initial timing and execution logistics has never been a recalibration of the intent of the ArtPlace opportunity – to truly rethink how these spaces can become integral parts of people's day-to-day lives in midtown and metro Detroit, but really a deepening of that commitment and forging a comprehensive strategy to support those objectives.

I truly believe our visitors will deem the risk well worth the reward!