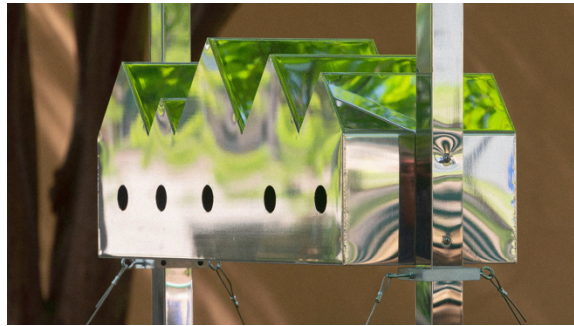


FAST COMPANY

April 19, 2023
By Nate Berg

This is what happens when starchitects design birdhouses

High-end birdhouse design is coming to a park in San Antonio.

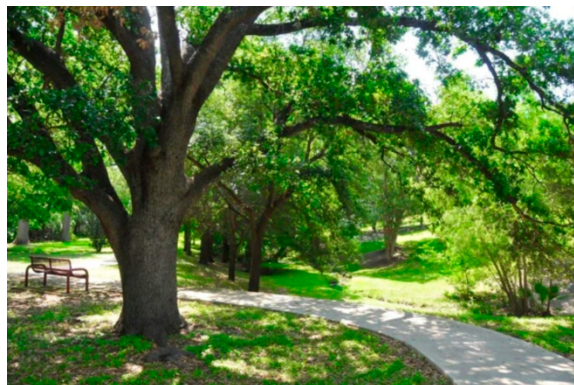


[Photo: Ansen Seale]

The birds of San Antonio will soon have nicer homes than you do.

Ten new birdhouses designed by some of the top architecture firms in the U.S. are set to be installed in historic [Brackenridge Park](#), a 400-acre cultural park north of downtown San Antonio. With daring shapes that put the typical boxy birdhouse to shame, these form-altering habitats are bringing high design to the avian world.

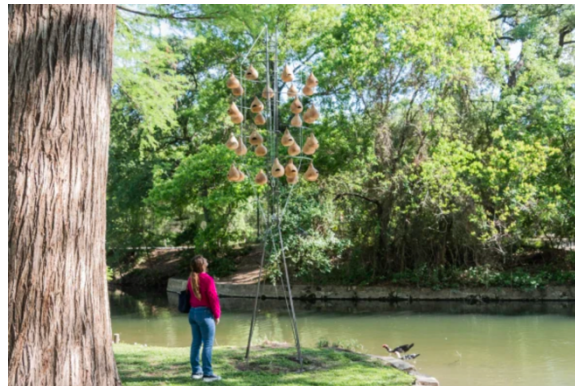
Architects from prominent firms including [Snøhetta](#), [Gensler](#), and [Olson Kundig](#) have contributed these designs as a benefit to the conservancy that oversees Brackenridge Park, and they'll all be installed along a new walking path being built throughout the park.



[Photo: courtesy Brackenridge Park]

One birdhouse is a blur of interwoven wires forming a 3D grid. Another is an abstracted totem pole, with several openings for birds to fly inside from underneath. Another takes the idea about as literally as can be: It's made out of an ostrich egg.

The idea to add architect-designed birdhouses to the park is the brainchild of Suzanne Mathews, director at the San Antonio-based architectural lighting manufacturer [Lucifer Lighting](#) and a member of the Brackenridge Park Conservancy's board of directors.



[Photo: Ansen Seale]

Mathews had been thinking about the park's birds after being introduced to bird enthusiast Randall Poster, a music supervisor in the film industry who's worked on TV shows like *Boardwalk Empire* and the films of director Wes Anderson. During the pandemic, Poster developed [For the Birds: Birdsong Project](#), a collection of compositions that celebrate the music of birds. Poster released it as a box set of 20 LP records featuring 172 songs and 73 poems inspired by birds and performed by artists including John Cale, Thurston Moore, and Yoko Ono. Proceeds from sales benefited the National Audubon Society.

Mathews saw an opportunity to do something similar for Brackenridge Park. But instead of bird-inspired music and poetry, Mathews wanted bird-inspired (and bird-serving) architecture. Working with Poster, she made a plan. Unique birdhouses could help the park better accommodate the large population of regional and migratory birds that use the space, including hummingbirds, chickadees, and martins. The birdhouses could also improve the visitor experience. Mathews started asking some of the architects she knows through Lucifer Lighting if they'd be interested in contributing a design to the project. "Everyone said yes," she says.

The result is a collection of 10 architectural showpieces, all of which were revealed recently during a gala event that also raised funds for the park. The birdhouses are on display at the [McNay Art Museum](#), after which they'll be installed in the park. Specially designed walking paths are now being constructed for visitors to stroll past the new collection.

"I thought it was a great way to bring design to San Antonio," Mathews says, "to bring an appreciation of architecture to San Antonio, and to bring a further appreciation of nature and the environment to San Antonio and to the park in a way where it's a soft sell, but very exciting."

See the designs below and learn more about what inspired them.

Marlon Blackwell, [Marlon Blackwell Architects](#)

Blackwell says his firm's design, Casa de Ave, sits "at the intersection of light, art, nature, and dwelling. It's not architecture but certainly has an architecture . . . like the birds themselves."



[Photo: Josh Huskin]

Angie Brooks and Larry Scarpa, [Brooks + Scarpa](#)



[Photo: Josh Huskin]

Roberto de Leon, [de Leon & Primmer Architecture Workshop](#)

De Leon says, "Our design approach embraces the distinctive characteristics of the hummingbird species that dwell in this special place through a nesting tapestry that coalesces ideas of craft, detail, and abode."



[Photo: Josh Huskin]

Craig Dykers and Elaine Molinar, [Snøhetta](#)

Dykers says, “Our bird nest is quite simply an egg for eggs. We have acquired an ostrich egg for the nest with found or reused materials to support it. Avoiding the use of industrialized materials is a part of the theme. The perch is a found branch, the mount is recycled wood. We imagine the softness of the egg to entice the little chickadee to use this haven for its home.”



[Photo: Josh Huskin]

Ted Flato, [Lake|Flato](#)



[Photo: Josh Huskin]

Everett L. Fly, [Everett L. Fly Architect](#)



[Photo: Josh Huskin]

Michael G. Imber, [Michael G. Imber Architects](#)

Imber says, “I wanted to contribute something that was playful and fun, yet lasting and played off that part of the park that was uniquely San Antonio.”



[Photo: Josh Huskin]

David Jameson, [David Jameson Architect](#)

Jameson says, “We propose a new multifamily habitat, For the Birds, providing reflection for humans to realize that without taking care of our natural environment, we’ll only be looking at ourselves.”



[Photo: Josh Huskin]

Tom Kundig, [Olson Kundig](#)



[Photo: Josh Huskin]

Judy Pesek, [Gensler](#)

Pesek says, "Our birdhouse is designed for a hummingbird. A hummingbird is sensitive visually, and has strong stamina. Small yet mighty. Our inspiration came from that of a Fabergé egg, with its simplicity of beauty and fine detail. They are small yet impactful."



[Photo: Josh Huskin]