

METROPOLIS

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By Adrian Madlener

Architects Design 10 Birdhouses to Support a Texas Park

Global design leaders produced high concept birdhouses to support Brackenridge Park, an important avian habitat in San Antonio, Texas.



David Jameson of David Jameson Architect Inc. designed Brackenridge Reflections using mirror-polished stainless steel to create a habitat for the Eastern Bluebird. COURTESY ANSEN SEALE

What do leading architecture firms [Brooks + Scarpa](#), [Lake | Flato](#), and [Olson Kundig](#)— have in common? A well-established exchange with family-run company [Lucifer Lighting](#), a San Antonio-based architectural lighting manufacturer known for producing innovative designs. Architects from these three firms, along with seven others were recently tapped by Suzanne Mathews, Lucifer Lighting's director, to design concept-driven birdhouses to raise awareness for Brackenridge Park, a 400-acre green lung and bird sanctuary in San Antonio. A resident of the Texas city, Mathews is herself an active member of the [Brackenridge Park Conservatory](#), an organization aiming to support its revitalization. Designs included a copper-hued aluminum wire nest and a suspended multi-dwelling complex that resembles the international space station, the collection of 10 miniature structures was revealed in situ during the organization's annual gala on April 11th to raise awareness about the park's other inhabitants.



Marlon Blackwell designed Casa de Ave as a home for the Black-Crested Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, European Starling, Golden- Fronted Woodpecker, Ladder-Backed Woodpecker, and Purple Martin. COURTESY ANSEN SEALE

Architectural Innovations for the Birds

While concepts by [Snøhetta](#)'s Craig Dykers and Elaine Molinar focused on the practical use of found objects, Everett L. Fly carved a dwelling out of a piece of Pecan wood and bark sourced from within the park itself. [Marlon Blackwell](#) paid homage to Lucifer Lighting with an illuminated bell-shaped enclosure constructed of laminated birch plywood and with bird foot motif that transforms the design into a lantern. His Casa De Ave is meant to accommodate the Black-Crested Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, Eastern Bluebird, European Starling, and Golden- Fronted Woodpecker, among other birds.



Tom Kundig of Olson Kundig Architects designed the Perch for the use of the Carolina Wren. COURTESY ANSEN SEALE

Most of the other designs were conceived with a specific species in mind and with the intention of recreating their unique habits and needs. Brooks + Scarpa's Home Tweet Home concept centers on the idea that the Purple Martin tends to not move very far or high to stalk its prey. The cluster formed structure works to trap insects and other plant life like moss. Fashioning an abode for the Eastern Bluebird, [David Jameson](#)'s mirror-polished Brackenridge Reflection house riffs-on the severe problem of [avian deaths caused by all-glass buildings](#). It's reported that over a billion birds die each year in the U.S. because of collisions with such structures.



Roberto de Leon of de Leon & Primmer Architecture Workshop designed Tapestry as a home for hummingbirds made of copper-hued aluminum wire. COURTESY ANSEN SEALE

Restoring Brackenridge Park, a 400-Acre Green Lung

All in all, the creative initiative brings to light the work that needs to be done to bring the park up to standard. Brackenridge is imbued with a past that reflects Texas's complex history. Over the centuries, natural waterways were reoriented throughout the site and now account for frequent flooding. Though it features stunning amenities like a Japanese garden embedded in a limestone quarry, a sumptuous neoclassical amphitheater, and a miniature train that winds around wooded areas, much of its infrastructure hasn't been maintained. A current masterplan by SWA aims to outfit the park with better pedestrian infrastructure among other improvements. Once a series of walking trails is completed, the 10 architect-designed birdhouses will support a bird walk program will help get locals acquainted with the park's diverse bird population. Until then, they're on view at the [McNay Art Museum](#).



Brooks + Scarpa's Home Tweet Home is a home for the Purple Martin made of 3D-printed PLA and acrylic paint. COURTESY ANSEN SEALE

For some, though, there may be some value in leaving things be. The general low economy of San Antonio has allowed many of its historic buildings to remain intact and unaffected by development," says Dykers, Snøhetta founding partner and former San Antonio resident. "There's value to negotiating between letting nature take over and human intervention." Currently undergoing a population boom owing to its affordability, San Antonio is the fastest growing city in the country. How Brackenridge meets the moment to facilitate this influx remains to be seen.