

San Antonio

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By Sallie Lewis

A New Fundraiser Sets Its Sights on The Birds of Brackenridge Park

See architect-designed birdhouses at the McNay through the fall



"Brackenridge Reflections" birdhouse for Eastern Bluebird by David Jameson of David Jameson Architect Inc.; photo by Ansen Seale

San Antonio's diversity may be visible across the city, but venture into Brackenridge Park, and you will hear it *sing*. Founded in 1899, the park today is home to a rich and abundant avian community, including American robins and woodpeckers, Carolina wrens, and black-crested titmouse, to name but a few.

Last week, these winged residents were the spotlight of a high-profile fundraising campaign called Party in the Park: Birdsong Brackenridge, hosted in partnership with Grammy Award–winning music supervisor Randall Poster and Suzanne Mathews, director at the San Antonio–based architectural lighting manufacturer Lucifer Lighting.

The event brought together architects from 10 internationally renowned firms to design one-of-a-kind birdhouses benefitting the Brackenridge Park Conservancy, which was founded in 2008 with the sole purpose of protecting the grounds. "We are really truly honored for them to have done this for us," says Mathews.

The origins of *Birdsong Brackenridge* first hatched during the pandemic. Like many during lockdown, Poster found birds to be a source of calm and inspiration, so much so that he co-founded and produced an art-filled, 20LP box set called *For the Birds: The Birdsong Project*, with over 200 tracks of original music by musicians including Elvis Costello and Yo-Yo Ma, along with poems and album covers by actors, poets, and visual artists. Last year, Poster's project inspired a multidisciplinary exhibition at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, in which site-specific birdhouses were created by international artists. After seeing the show, Mathews was motivated to bring the concept to her native Texas.

On April 11, that effort came full circle as guests descended on Brackenridge Park to admire the wide-ranging birdhouses designed by some of today's top working architects, like Judy Pesek of Gensler.



"Multi Martin Housing" birdhouse for purple martins by Ted Flato of Lake|Flato; photo by Ansen Seale

"I love the hummingbird, and since they build their nests out of spiderweb silk, the Fabergé egg came to mind, because they're delicate and detail-oriented," she says of her design inspiration. "When the sun was shining this morning, you could really see the detail ... someone said it looked like fabric, but it's clear mesh resin, 3D-printed."

As dusk descended over the park's Koehler Pavilion, guests took in the varying sculptural and organic designs with cocktails in hand. Ted Flato of local firm Lake|Flato crafted his submission with steel and gourds especially for the purple martin, while Craig Dykers and Elaine Molinar of *Snøhetta* used found materials to lure the Carolina chickadee.

Guests were then treated to a seated dinner by chef Jason Dady, with musical programming curated by Poster and special performances by Ballet San Antonio. As the ballerinas danced vignettes from *Sleeping Beauty*, their movements cast shadows on the stately cypress trees. Meanwhile, the surrounding birdhouses were elevated and illuminated, inviting admiration throughout the evening.



"Egg-travagant" birdhouse for hummingbirds by Judy Pesek of Gensler; photo by Ansen Seale

After the event, the birdhouses were moved to the grounds of the McNay Art Museum, where they'll be on view through the fall before being permanently installed in Brackenridge Park.

In a fun expansion, a group of fifth graders from Bonham Academy and Hawthorne Academy who are part of the Kids Initiating Design Solutions (KIDS) elementary architecture program of UTSA's Young Artist Programs were invited by the Birdsong Brackenridge organizers to design their own birdhouses. Those will be on display at San Antonio's Central Library through the end of the month, and an exhibition reception and awards presentation will take place on Tuesday, April 18, at 6 p.m. in the library gallery as part of the venue's grand reopening celebrations. Young visitors at the reception can receive a pair of "Birdoculars" by the popular eyewear company, Warby Parker, whose generous donation is aimed at inspiring the next generation of naturalists.

"The birdhouse project is a terrific opportunity for students to showcase their creative abilities and problem-solving skills," says Ramon Muñoz, UTSA's Young Artist Program coordinator. "Any bird would be lucky to call one of these birdhouses home."