



COURTESY OF HACIN & ASSOCIATES

ONE AREA ARCHITECT AND FOURTEEN DESIGNERS COME TOGETHER TO CREATE A STYLISH AND SOOTHING FIRST STEP OUT OF HOMELESSNESS IN BOSTON'S NEW PROJECT PLACE BUILDING.

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

TEXT BY JILL HARRINGTON | PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF SAM GRAY AND ERIC ROTH

In early February, fourteen top Boston-area designers met at a South End building, each assigned a stark 250-square-foot studio space to work their magic upon. It could've been a scene out of reality TV show *Top Design*—minus the snarky competition and for a far better cause than mere fame. | Their assignment: to style, *pro bono*, these blank canvas efficiency apartments into cozy homes for



TOP: The room by Michael Barnum, with carpet tiles by Flor.
BOTTOM: Heather G. Wells's room employs soothing blues.



TOP: SAM GRAY; BOTTOM: ERIC ROTH

Project Place residents climbing out of homelessness.

Within a week, it was an interior transformed. "The designers took all this white space and made it into a home for men and women who had been living on the streets," says Suzanne Kenney, executive director of Project Place, which helps homeless and low-income individuals by providing skills, education and resources needed to find stable employment and housing. "It's just amazing."

Architect David Hacin of Hacin and Associates set the stage for this eventual design-a-thon with his work on the new Project Place building, a project that cost around \$11 million, with city, state and federal money combining with \$2.67 million raised privately by Project Place. Kenney first approached Hacin when it became apparent Project Place had outgrown its home of forty years in a run-down South End Victorian. "The executive director's enthusiasm inspired me right off the bat," says Hacin, himself a South End resident. "And I believe good design knows no economic boundaries."

City land on the corner of East Berkeley and Washington streets was targeted. A mandate that new buildings on city land include housing sent Project Place in a new, and welcome, direction—offering transitional housing to its clients. Residents pay rent and are expected to work, often in one of Project Place's three small businesses.

The top two floors of the five-story building are for residents, who'll get the best views and light, with the offices and program areas closer to the street. In keeping with the socially conscious nature of the project, Hacin used green practices throughout, from a geothermal heating/cooling system to a reflective roof. The two-tone brick exterior carries a message, too: red represents tradition, while the beige brick is both a nod to its modern present and recalls the beach that used to be here before being filled in to create modern-day Boston.

"David listened to our needs and synthesized it into design," says Ken-



ERIC ROTH

ney. "He did an incredible job of making a livable place for us for the next forty years."

With the building set, it was time to head indoors. South End resident and interior designer Dennis Duffy was the design ringleader, tapped to recruit others to pitch in with the adopt-a-room program. "I started making phone calls," recalls Duffy. "I think one person said 'no' but everyone else said yes or expressed interest. That's pretty amazing."

The designers had some basic guidelines—keep it gender-neutral, comfortable and easy to maintain. Project Place provided several basic furnishings, including a twin bed, desk, shelf and nightstand, and Sherwin-Williams donated low-toxicity paint in historic colors that decorators had to choose from, in part for easy matching and touchups down the road, Kenney says. Flor offered a discount on its carpet tiles. The rest, including tableware, towels, bedding, accessories and art, was ponied up by the designers or via individually solicited donations.

Although they had only 250 square feet to work with, including a kitchenette and private bath, designers' ingenuity and individuality made it a virtual Disneyland of design moments.

For organizer Duffy, the best part of his room cast in shades of green, marine blue and khaki, was the reading nook, eschewing a table to include a green oversize slipper chair. "What I was most intent on was the resident having a place to relax," Duffy says.

A quote by Philip Moffitt, "A house is a home when it shelters the body and comforts the soul," stenciled on the wall served as the focal point of designer Eric Roseff's room, painted in soft blues and browns. "For me, this quote is what this project was all about," says Roseff.

Designer Duncan Hughes used warm, earthy tones in his adopted space—burnt orange, cinnamon, chocolate brown and green—as a respite from city life. Hughes also used sustainable products as

TOP: The room by Michael Carter. BOTTOM: Dennis Duffy's favorite part of his adopted room, the reading nook.



TOP: Doreve Nicholaeff Architect's room uses natural materials.
BOTTOM: Mirrors create visual interest in the Terrat Elms room.



TOP: SAM GRAY; BOTTOM: ERIC ROTH

much as possible, such as all-natural fabrics and barware made of recycled glass. "I believe in the transformative power of your environment," says Hughes. "It was a chance to help promote the well-being of the person using this room."

Designers tapped their connections and resources for donations. Mitchell Gold donated a chair and Chris Robert provided window treatments for the Terrat Elms room, says designer Dee Elms. "That our vendors were eager to help made it feel even better—it was really all hands on deck with this."

Interior designer Heather Wells even commissioned two original contemporary paintings by her friend Sarah Abbuzzese, a South End artist, for Wells's cheery blue and yellow room.

Many of the design team have agreed to help maintain their adopted rooms over time and between residents, but Project Place will continue to need the community's support and donations, as Kenney says they still need to raise an-



other \$300,000. Residents started arriving in early April, and the attractive building has helped ease the program's debut in its new location. And in September Joanne Chung of Flour Bakery and Cafe will become a Project Place tenant, opening a restaurant on the first floor, making the building a destination

for the public as well.

"From a neighborhood viewpoint, this building could have been met with apprehension, given what Project Place does," says Hacin. "But I've had many people say how much they like the building, that it helps to anchor that end of Washington Street. Design is a

good calling card."

And those who participated got as much out of it as the residents. "It built a sense of camaraderie among designers," says Duffy. "It's enriched our lives, while giving back to the community—how often do you get to do something like that?" **NEH**

EDITOR'S NOTE Boston-area design firms that participated in the Project Place adopt-a-room program are Barnum and Company, Carter and Company, Dietz and Associates, Doreve Nicholaeff Architect, Duffy Design Group, Duncan Hughes Interiors, Eric Roseff Designs, Gauthier-Stacy, Heather G. Wells Ltd, Homeworks, Space Design Studios, Mark Bombara Interior Design, Mark Christofi Interior Design and Terrat Elms Interior Design. For more information or to make a donation, contact Project Place at (617) 262-3740 or on the Web, www.projectplace.org.



TOP LEFT: SAM GRAY; TOP RIGHT AND BOTTOM: ERIC ROTH

TOP LEFT: Earth tones blend in Duncan Hughes's room. **TOP RIGHT:** A fun light fixture jumps out in the room by Mark Bombara. **BOTTOM:** The twin bed becomes a daybed in the room by Eric Roseff.