RE-ENVISIONING
THE KIMMEL CENTER
through Civic Engagement and Design
In 2001, after many years of discussion, debate and anticipation, the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts finally opened its doors in downtown Philadelphia. In addition to housing Philadelphia’s premier performing arts groups, including the world-renowned Philadelphia Orchestra, this monumental building was designed to serve as an indoor plaza and community destination for Philadelphians and visitors alike. Several years later, the Kimmel Center still offers an amazing variety of performances on its four stages, but has yet to deliver a real destination for the general public. The space which was originally conceived to facilitate meeting, lingering and exploration is better known for its emptiness and inaccessibility.

Over the course of several months beginning in January 2008, undergraduate students at the University of Pennsylvania worked in conjunction with PennPraxis and the students at the University of the Arts to re-evaluate architectural designs and programming for the Kimmel Center. These assessments were intended to address public space issues and to work toward invigorating the lifeless communal spaces. This undertaking was the main project for the course, Graphic Design Practicum at Penn, which brought together six senior architecture students with six students of design. Under the leadership of Laurie Churchman, professor of Fine Arts, and Harris Steinberg, director of PennPraxis, these students worked together in an effort to realize the Kimmel Center’s great potential as a functional and engaging public space.

PennPraxis is a non-profit organization created by PennDesign in an effort to put practical, urban use to designs created in the classroom by PennDesign students and faculty. Using the framework provided by PennPraxis, in partnership with the Penn Project for Civic Engagement, led by Penn faculty member Harris Sokoloff in collaboration with Chris Satullo of the Great Expectations Project at the Philadelphia Inquirer, the students considered feedback and suggestions provided by the community when contemplating ideas for reimagining the public spaces at the Kimmel Center. Students broke into three groups to pursue different approaches to invigorating this world-class building. With the guidance of professors, professionals, members of community and Kimmel Center employees, the groups proposed architectural, graphic and programmatic changes that took on three themes: Humanize, Connect to the Arts, and Sensory Experience. Ranging from large-scale changes like a nine-story waterwall, to small-scale suggestions like an illuminated sidewalk, the groups considered every aspect of the Kimmel Center’s potential public spaces. These themes were presented to members of the community at a public presentation after several months of reconfiguring and fine-tuning the designs. The presentation was intended to spark further conversation and contribute to a more concrete plan for the Kimmel Center’s next steps.

The public has taken great interest in this monumental undertaking. $235 million went toward realizing architect Rafael Viñoly’s colossal design. Those who waited so patiently for their time and money to materialize into this magnificent building want to see its potential fully realized. The students, worked diligently to address the needs of the public by bringing new life and excitement to this bold architectural feat. We progressed under the shared philosophy that the Kimmel Center is home to Philadelphia’s finest performance arts groups, but its beauty and magnificence should be enjoyed by all.
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Afterword
Rafael Viñoly’s larger-than-life design for the Kimmel Center was realized after nearly a quarter of a billion and many years of deliberation. This world-class space houses Philadelphia’s finest performing arts groups and was built under the premise that its plaza and common areas would be shared with the entire Philadelphia community.
The Kimmel Center was conceived in 1996 when two architectural projects being pursued in Philadelphia were brought together and reassessed as one unified commission. The Philadelphia Orchestra was in need of a new performing arts house, and the then-mayor of Philadelphia Edward Rendell was in search of a new venue that would accommodate the other prominent performing arts groups in the city. The plans for these projects merged and the concept of the Kimmel Center was born. Slated for construction at the corner of Broad and Spruce Streets, the Regional Performing Arts Center helped to secure plans and coordinate the details of this enormous undertaking. Rafael Viñoly, an Argentinean architect was eventually chosen to spearhead the design process. When the Kimmel Center first opened its doors in December of 2001, the city was beaming with anticipation as visions of “Philadelphia’s very own Lincoln Center” began to materialize.

The Kimmel Center facilities house eight resident performing arts groups, including The Philadelphia Orchestra, Peter Nero and the Philly Pops, PHILADANCO, The Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, The Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, the American Theater Arts for Youth, the Opera Company of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Ballet. These eight groups share Verizon Hall and Perelman Theater. The Kimmel Center also houses Innovation Studio, a basement-level space conducive to experimental productions. This remarkable list of performers is the primary reason the Kimmel Center was brought to life, but its facility was also a public destination. This promise has fallen short as the Kimmel generally only enjoys crowds around performance times and for special events.

This magnificent structure was imagined with the best of intentions for Philadelphians, but architectural roadblocks and programmatic shortcomings have left the center fairly isolated from the general public. Its 150-foot high vaulted glass ceiling towers over Broad Street, but is relatively invisible to the average pedestrian. Instead, those at street level are confronted with heavy, uninviting brick façades that hardly allude to the Kimmel Center’s architectural brilliance. Once inside, visitors are faced with an enormous stone lobby space that offers little activity, information or seating options. The third floor restaurant, Cadence, is primarily open during peak hours and is usually only enjoyed by performance-goers.

The time, effort and great expectations toward realizing this ambitious vision for Philadelphia’s Avenue of the Arts were inspiring, but have sadly fallen short because the Kimmel Center is not the buzzing public plaza once imagined. The public outcry has resounded and the Kimmel staff has responded. Recently relieved of its $30 million deficit, the Kimmel Center is now able to move toward actualizing its potential as a world-class public plaza and gathering space. Many people believe in this project and have gone to great lengths to help it fulfill its capacity for greatness.
The Avenue of the Arts is the heart of Philadelphia’s cultural scene, anchored by the dramatic Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, and lined with theaters, fine restaurants and local and national retailers. Magnificent new condominium projects, on the Avenue and nearby, have drawn a large and affluent residential population base.
THE KIMMEL NOW
COMMONWEALTH PLAZA
In Context  The Kimmel Now

Upper Tiers
The Kimmel Now

IN CONTEXT

EXTERIOR
SIGNAGE
Programming

Brochures handed out at the information center in Commonwealth Plaza.

Studios offered to performing groups in the basement of the Kimmel.
Private receptions at Commonwealth Plaza

Private receptions at Hamilton Garden, Perelman Theater, and the Academy of Music
In order to transform the Kimmel Center into a dynamic performing arts public space, several performing arts venues from around the world were carefully researched, analyzed and considered. Similar to the Kimmel Center, these venues share its architectural grandeur as a state of the art performance space; however, they also serve as a sight for attraction and public destination. Some of these best practices include the iconic Sydney Opera House in Sydney, Australia, the revitalized Lincoln Center in New York, US, the eclectic Sendai Mediatheque in Sendai, Japan, and the newly constructed National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing, China.

Through these examples, it is evident that these dynamic centers are achieved through a variety of techniques such as the maintenance of transparency between the activities inside the venue and the outside to engage and invite the public, the creation of additional intimate interactive spaces designed for the public to visit and linger, and also the implementation of intensive programming ranging from entertainment to didactic.
Bernard Tschumi
Zenith Concert Hall
Limoges, France 2007

Jorn Utzon and
Ove Arup & Partners
Sydney Opera House
Sydney, Australia 1973

Jean Marie Charpentier
Shanghai Grand Theatre
Shanghai, China 1998

ARTS VENUES WORLDWIDE
The Penn Project for Civic Engagement called upon citizens to provide feedback and insight into their ideas for the Kimmel Center. This information guided the Kimmel Center’s re-evaluation and will eventually shape the changes that the Kimmel Center will undergo to help it become the dynamic public space that was originally intended.
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The Kimmel Center’s public space reassessment began. Over 200 citizens attended one of four public forums, held in January 2008 after a brief tour and explanation of the Kimmel Center’s mission. Moderators lead small groups in dialogue about the Kimmel Center’s strengths and weaknesses. These groups discussed, debated and brainstormed aspects of the Kimmel Center that they wanted to see improved. The results of these forums were compiled and themes were extracted. Harris Sokoloff, of the Penn Project for Civic Engagement, met with Penn students to refine a list of principles that encompassed these primary themes. The civic process and results from the public forums were recorded by columnists from the Philadelphia Inquirer and posted to the urban planning website, www.planphilly.com. Information was made widely accessible and feedback from the public was strongly encouraged throughout the entire process.

Using the principles gathered from the public feedback, Penn and UArts students started imagining how this input could translate into actual transformations. Mini-charettes and lists of ideas were created to address the individual principles. Penn students broke into three four-person groups, to visualize ideas in preliminary architectural drawings and graphic renderings. Professors, architects, and the Kimmel Center staff gave continual feedback and insight throughout the process.

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The designs matured into well-developed thematic approaches to readdressing the Kimmel Center. On April 14, 2008, another civic forum was held. This time, the three groups presented plans for enlivening the Kimmel Center’s public spaces, and the audience was asked to respond to the proposals. More than 200 people attended the presentation, held in the Perelman Theater. The attendees were again asked to break into small groups and were given the opportunity to respond to the design concepts.

From the Kimmel Center’s conception in 1996 and continuing through today, the public has been one of the central factors influencing the Kimmel Center’s role as an urban plaza. Therefore, it is only fitting that the public would be so involved in the Center’s renovation. As this process continues to develop, the public will undoubtedly be asked to provide feedback and insight until the Kimmel Center is finally viewed as the dynamic public space that Philadelphia deserves.
Harris Sokoloff (Penn Project for Civic Engagement) leads a civic feedback session, January 2008
A more inviting Kimmel Center

When the last time you told a friend, "Hey, let's hang out at the Kimmel?"

Never, right? I'm not surprised.

The Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, with its startling red-brick, arcing roof on South Broad Street, became an icon of Philadelphia's cultural renais-

sance even before it was completed. In 2006, it opened its doors. It is home to the Philadelphia Orchestra and five other resident companies.

The stunning glass canopy at the performance venues, the vibrant Perelman Theater and the two theaters, the Kimmel Center is an evolving Avenue of the Arts.

The forums are being run by the Penn Project on Civic Engagement, which will con-

vocate the view point of Penn Project, the design studies at the University of Pennsylvania, a school that recently produced the ac-

formalism master for the Broad-

The Philadelphia Inquirer, is on display to show how the public spaces, is on display. It aims to prove the Kimmel's leadership and a sam-

ing will be printed in The In-

scription to May 11) —

The Kimmel Center officially is called Commonwealth Plaza.

For more ideas on how to improve the public spaces, see our companion issue.

Kimmel from B to C

You work at the place in vain for signs of warmth, wel-

come or friendliness. It's a build-

ing designed to be admired, not loved, to look good in overlookings, not to serve vibrant theater.

At intervals along the cold glass at doorways, that stretch across the entrance plaza and airport, and they're near clus-

ers of doors that could be al-

lowed from a high-school cafet-

aria. In a classic chicken eye-

distance, the lack of foot traf-

cue has made the building's two half, restaurant and gift shop, closed much of the time.

As a critic, it's no

killing Norman Sheller. The god news is that the Kimmel's new CEO, Ann Kw-

ors, is intent on improving the public spaces.

The Kimmel is a myriad of changes.

It will be followed by three more next month. All told, about 200 citizens will go into what they like, and don't like about the Kimm-

el. They'll offer ideas for improved program and des-

ign that would make people visit more often.

The forums are run by the Penn Project on Civic Engagement, which will con-

vocate the viewpoint of Penn Project, the design studies at the University of Pennsylvania, a school that recently produced the ac-

aimed as a civic engagement, blended with

Awards for Center City District.

Center Square is B adorned in a collection of trees.

Kimmel 30, its doors in 2006.

Kimmel Project, The In-

quire, 40307, Philadelphia-

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A more inviting space for the arts

Penn Praxis working on renovation plans for Kimmel Center

By KATIE KARAS

A downtown performing arts venue is getting a public makeover boost from members of the Penn community.

Students and professors are teaming up with the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts this semester in an attempt to create a more vibrant and welcoming public space downtown.

The Kimmel Center is the centerpiece of a plan to revitalize the downtown area for the arts. Penn Praxis—an affiliate of Penn’s School of Design—engages students and faculty in public projects—art, neighborhood beautification, and mobilizing them to take a more active role in community decision making.

For the renovation, Gruskin continued, the Kimmel Center home to a variety of opera, dance, theater, and art—should be transformed into an area more inclusive arts venues.

The Kimmel Center, a popular downtown performing arts venue, will see some design changes, due in part to the efforts of Penn Praxis. Designers hope to turn the center into a more welcoming public space.

See KIMMEL, page 5

KIMMEL, from page 2

to formulate ideas on how to re-

mark the Kimmel Center.

Penn Praxis is best known for its redesign plans for a south-side stretch of the Delaware River, which were criticized last No-

vember by municipal reviews.

Penn Praxis executive direc-
tor Harris Shroeder said the site was approached by the Kimmel Cen-
ter a few months ago because Kimmel officials felt the building had developed too much purpose.

“Where it was built, the inten-
tion was to be a vibrant pub-
lic space,” he said. “Shroeder said

that it’s the public’s decision whether it’s in the center.

Margaret O’Grady, who works at an office building a few blocks away and who comes to the Kimmel Center’s Commons Hall on a regular basis, said the art helps create a sense of community and fills its empty spaces relaxing.

“I really run into anyone els-

er’s Department: ‘They really mark beautiful, but there’s nothing
to attract people here when there aren’t events.’

Now that data has been gath-
ered from the center’s forums and other public space design projects, Shroeder said the results will be used to guide his new project plan.

A new study showed there’s a market for arts-related activities in the area.

The results are to be presented at a public forum that will be held at the center Tuesday, Feb. 5.

The center will focus on a high point April 14 when the student vision are presented for pub-

lic comments and the Kimmel Center’s Peter’s Theatre. You’ve invited.

The meeting will run from 6 to 7:30.

Space is limited, so register at the Web site (www.plan-

philadelphia.com/Kimmel). Penn Praxis, the design consultant that has man-

aged this process for the Kimmel Center, will offer a 1,050-foot-long

third, inclusive arts venue. The grand public spaces of an arts center should be filled with the sights and sounds of art. Let music permeate the space beyond performance times. Locate and set the stage in the plaza to lure members of the public who don’t consider the Kimmel their arts center. Urge var-

ied performances by diverse groups in this third venue to ad-

See KIMMEL, page B6

Penn Praxis works on redesign plans for Kimmel Center

Kimmel from B1
dwelling large image prob-

lems with affordability and in-

clusiveness.

3. Create magnets to lure mixed uses and mixed users. Vibrant towns, squares are rich in the uses of a variety of tastes. With its loca-
tion and imposing facade, the Kimmel Center must work hand in hand with the people who want to live into its public spaces on a daily basis who people who want to

Kimmel from page 2

to have some welcome changes, due in part to the efforts of Penn Praxis. Designers hope to turn the center into a more welcoming public space.

The effort to tune up the Kimmel

The final move in this civic symphony will be to open the Kimmel Center to visitors that the center sees as guests to be wel-

come, not interlopers to be excluded. The entry spaces now
designed austere and cold. An
some concern focuses on the

Kimmel Center’s core client is the public.

The 1,050-foot-long

MATH

IN ISRAEL

BOMBERS

B3.

The 1,050-foot-long

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Kimmel Center’s core client is the public.
THE PRINCIPLES
1. INSIDE/OUT AND OUTSIDE/IN
The outside of the building must let the public see, hear and feel what is happening inside the building. The outside — now seen as foreboding, dull and confusing — should broadcast a sense of excitement and activity onto the street. The approaches to the building must coax visitors in by helping them see how, where and when to enter. In sum, the exterior of the building must more effectively explain, promote and invite.

2. TREAT COMMONWEALTH PLAZA AS THE THIRD ARTS VENUE — AN INCLUSIVE PUBLIC VENUE.
The grand public spaces of a temple of the performing arts should be filled with the sights and sounds of art. Allow music to permeate the space beyond performance times. Locate and use the stage in the plaza to lure members of the public who don’t now consider the Kimmel ‘their’ arts center. Use varied public performances by diverse performers in this ‘third venue’ to address the center’s image problems with accessibility, affordability and inclusion.

3. CREATE MAGNETS TO LURE MIXED USES AND MIXED USERS.
Vibrant town squares are rich in things to do, appealing to a variety of tastes. With its location and imposing façade, the Kimmel must work hard to lure people — particularly people not now patrons of the resident companies — into its public spaces on a daily basis and to want to linger there. Create an iconic focal point and gathering spot in the lobby. The yearning is universal for more use of color to enliven and warm spaces now widely considered austere, drab and cold. The single most often expressed wish is for greenery on the first-floor plaza. This would bring in the warmth that defines our best outdoor public squares. Water is another element that many suggest would enliven and soften the experience of the space. Food, coffee, wireless internet access, shopping, lectures and classes, and an arts bookstore are just a few of the uses the public cites as attractions that would draw them to Commonwealth Plaza. Those various uses must be available on a visible, consistent basis — with ‘dark’ hours kept to a minimum and clearly communicated to the public.

4. OFFER A WARMER WELCOME — AND A MAP TO NAVIGATE.
Convey to visitors that the center sees them as guests to be welcomed, not interlopers to be handled. With an inviting gathering space upon entry, the lobby should express that the center’s core client is the public, not just large donors. Signs and posters should offer a sense of welcome, not suspicion: an array of Do’s, not a list of Don’ts. Take advantage of technology — laptops, iPods, LED screens, interactive kiosks — to give visitors information about what the center offers and how to use it. The building can be confusing and intimidating to the newcomer; offer more guidance on how to get around it.

5. WOW! WHAT NOW?
Though grand and elegant, Commonwealth Plaza often overwhelms people when they enter the building. Offer clusters of comfortable seating conducive to lingering and conversation. Create nooks. Make better use of dead-end hallways. Break the vast lobby space into smaller settings, using flexible furnishings that can be moved to accommodate larger events.

6. BALANCE AESTHETIC VALUES AND COMMERCIAL APPEAL
Efforts to enliven Commonwealth Plaza and attract a broader public should not sacrifice the Kimmel Center’s core values as a home for world-class artistry: quality, taste and elegance.
Over the course of several months, three small groups pursued the reassessment of the Kimmel Center’s public space on the basis of individual themes, which addressed needs for architectural, graphic, and programmatic changes.
HUMANIZE THE SPACE
Ainsley Adams
Matthew Hotsko
Katy Rose Glickman
Aura Seltzer

CONNECT TO THE ARTS
Andrew Watterson
Rachel Gogel
Crista McDonald
Mindy King

SENSORY EXPERIENCE
Ross Cockrell
Angelika Kyrimi
Bonnie Liu
Caitlin Owens
The Big Ideas

Armed with feedback from the public, and the acknowledgment that we were working with an architectural icon, the process began. The common ideas from the civic principles formed our underlying structure, over which we began to layer new ideas. We worked in a multi-disciplinary studio, collaborating with students from UA Arts studying Industrial Design and Museum Exhibit design.

We began by researching best practices locally and internationally. We gathered inspiration from many great public buildings, and generated ideas exploring new technology and the uses of space. We talked to each other and invited professionals into our studios to critique our ideas, as well as collaborating with UA Arts through a series of charrettes and digital feedback. We concentrated on larger conceptual possibilities for the Kimmel Center such as architectural reorganization and programming, while the UA Arts students focused on more specific details such as furniture ideas and artistic interventions. After much debate and seemingly endless discussion, we began to develop concrete ideas that we felt suitably addressed the Kimmel Center’s public space re-evaluation. We then divided into three teams in order to fully explore different methods of enlivening Commonwealth Plaza.

From these teams, three “big ideas” emerged: Humanize, Connect to the Arts, and Sensory Experience. The Humanize team embraced the vast vertical space within the Kimmel while adding features that made the open spaces more inviting and intimate. The Connect to the Arts team used sculptural connections to provide greater access and encourage interactivity across the large space of the Plaza. They also included more public art to help connect the performing arts with the visual arts. The Sensory Experience team used the senses as a guide to drape the Kimmel Center’s interior surfaces. This approach magnified the experiences of vision, taste, touch, sound, and smell through architectural, sculptural and programmatic changes.
Our design attempts to make the Kimmel Center a more vibrant and multi-functional public space. These changes take advantage of the Kimmel Center’s dramatic architecture, street presence, and large public spaces to make the Kimmel a destination within Philadelphia.
THE PROJECT  Humanize the Space

Inspiration for Perelman Wrapping Staircase

Inspiration for illuminated Sidewalks for Kimmel exterior

DESIGN PROCESS

Sketch of grand staircase and first tier intermission space

Sketch of Commonwealth Plaza

Sketch of Perelman First Tier Intermission Space (across from Perelman Theater)
The Kimmel Center’s dramatic architecture and expansive interior provide the framework for the building to become the distinctive public space we envision. By redesigning specific interior and exterior elements, we aim to transform the Kimmel Center into a more vibrant and enjoyable destination. Our design brings the Kimmel to a more human scale by improving circulation, developing a new signage system, reorganizing existing functions, and incorporating new uses. Three new staircases make movement through the building easier and more memorable. Each of these staircases leads to a major destination within the Kimmel Center: the redesigned Rooftop Garden and playground, the first tier lobby, or Cadence Restaurant. Renovations within Commonwealth Plaza, including the relocated PECO Bar and Lounge make the space more inviting, in addition to more comfortable and permanent furniture.
Our most dramatic recommendation for increasing vertical movement is a new stair wrapping around Perelman Theater. It begins in Commonwealth Plaza near the Broad Street entrance and wraps around the shape of the theater on its way up to the rooftop garden. It stops at three different terraces and continues around a new glass elevator. An additional elevator provides visitors with a more visible route directly from Commonwealth Plaza to the rooftop garden. This new Perelman stair is designed to be sculptural and complementary to the existing forms of Perelman Theater. It enlivens the void above Commonwealth Plaza and provides visitors with a more engaging way to experience and interact with the Kimmel Center. Dramatic views not currently accessible also create a unique and memorable experience.

We redesigned the stairs inside the Spruce Street doors to reflect the sense of openness created in Commonwealth Plaza. This grand staircase which is larger, more dramatic, and more secure, addresses concerns from early forums. The enlarged stair’s modern curves create a more attractive view from the main entrance and draw visitors upstairs from Commonwealth Plaza.
The new Perelman Stairs start at Commonwealth Plaza, wrap around the theater through three tiers, and end at the Rooftop Garden and playground.
ROOFTOP PLAYGROUND

Rooftop playground

Artistic play equipment and a leaping fountain for the Rooftop Garden and playground

Illuminated glass furniture for both Commonwealth and Rooftop public spaces
1ST TIER PUBLIC SPACES

First tier floor plan

Proposed Spruce Street balcony

View of the enlarged Grand Stair leading to an expanded and redesigned first tier lobby
COMMONWEALTH PLAZA

Proposed Commonwealth Floor Plan

Sample of glass wayfinding with illuminated base
We began redesigning Commonwealth Plaza by moving the existing bar into the corner currently occupied by the stage. This opened up a larger area for more comfortable and more permanent lounge-style seating that will encourage people to linger in the plaza. The seating centers around a stage inlaid in the ground. This type of pedestrian stage is more appropriate for the public nature of the performances and makes the lounge space more flexible.

In order to ease circulation in Commonwealth Plaza and throughout the building, we are creating a new signage system that uses large graphics compatible with the scale of the building and easily visible throughout the large space. These large graphics continue onto the building’s exterior to enhance the Kimmel Center’s visibility and street presence. On a smaller scale, we are implementing free-standing glass directories. These directories are located throughout the building and are designed with illuminated bases, more specific directions, and accompanying maps.

Playful furniture options appeal to younger visitors in the proposed Information Center; sample Café for Commonwealth Plaza.
We further enhanced the Kimmel Center’s public spaces by reorganizing the activities along Spruce Street to enliven the block by increasing transparency and bring the outside in and the inside out. This meant moving the building’s public functions to more accessible locations and making activity within the Kimmel Center more visible from the exterior. Our changes included: redesigning the corner of Spruce and Broad, adding a café where the current ticket booth sits, reorienting the Spruce Street entrance to open the space more, and placing an expanded information center just inside the window.
An additional entrance and a proposed sidewalk café at the corner of Broad and Spruce Streets providing outdoor seating will invigorate the block.

Illuminated and interactive sidewalks bordering the Kimmel

Our goal is to activate the entire block and to create a unique identity for the Kimmel that visitors will immediately recognize. We will do this with new exterior signage and interactive sidewalk panels. These touch-sensitive, frosted glass squares will border the entire building and light up when stepped on. This also relates to other public lighting projects currently underway in Philadelphia. We will create a cohesive aesthetic between the interior and exterior using the same type of large signage and graphics used on the interior. Digital schedules on three sides of the building as well as screens displaying videos from past and upcoming performances will further brighten the exterior.
CONNECT TO THE ARTS

A plan for the Kimmel Center that invigorates the building with public arts of every stripe, embraces its majestic size, and adopts socially-conscious, sustainable operating principles.

Andrew Watterson
Rachel Gogel
Crista McDonald
Mindy King
From left to right:
Original Rooftop Garden concept: View of new ramp from third tier; UArts sketch of revised Rooftop Garden; ramp to top of Verizon visible; Benches mounted to existing planters.

Example of curved bench; Comfortable seating and coexisting greenery; UArts sketch of seating under Verizon Hall overhang.

Top of Verizon Hall as new destination with seating, fountains, water sculptures and water walls.

Commonwealth Plaza, fountain as focal concept surrounded by trees and curved benches.
Sustainable concept:
Vault covered by vines;
Rooftop Garden connected
to top of Verizon by a ramp;
New elevator on 15th Street side;
top of Verizon Hall becomes
fantastical garden with a
water fountain and water wall
as well as seating

UArts sketch of
Spruce Street side; Sketch of
North Elevation with green
vault; top of Verizon
as a new destination

DESIGN PROCESS

Olafur Eliasson’s Take Your
Time installation; waterwall;
Stravinsky Fountain in Paris

Sidewalk concept:
Artwork by Jeff VerPlanck

Connect to the Arts  THE PROJECT
The Plaza Tower: Elevator/staircase; one hub for easy access to all areas of the Kimmel Center starting from the sculpture garden in Commonwealth Plaza, the tower connects visitors to new views and a variety of new spaces.
We envision a plan for the Kimmel that will engage the public with new programs and bring life to all areas of the building. The highlight of our design is a central Plaza Tower that provides the public with more direct access to each tier as well as allowing visitors to enjoy the Kimmel from many different perspectives. This new sculpture acts as a mode of transportation and a centerpiece in the plaza, and both physically and visually connects the various areas of the Kimmel.

Previously empty spaces are transformed into destinations more conducive to lingering, socializing and viewing art. We also plan to include more public art along the tiers and in the plaza. For example, the plaza has become a gallery, with sculptures that can also be used as seating and walls are enlivened by mounted art.

Another hallmark of our design is a reconceived Rooftop Garden that includes versatile seating, a new overhang for shading and a small pool. All these new destinations are flexible to accommodate larger events and offer mixed activities to lure a broader public. In addition, the interior becomes a hub for public art and lounging.

In our concept, the Kimmel acts a place for gathering, where people will not only come to hear the music of the resident companies, but to grab a cup of coffee, socialize and view art. We believe that our design creates a variety of flexible areas encouraging the public to relate to each other, to the art and to the Kimmel itself.
AREAS TO LINGER

Newly opened corridor through the Kimmel to the 15th Street entrance: More space available for seating, art viewing, and access to the interactive lounge, which holds computers and virtual games.

Stage area next to existing bar: Small performance stage used as a public art gallery and as seating during non-show times.

Existing Verizon Hall overhang: New and more comfortable seating next to a public art gallery, and added greenery for warmth.

Music listening library on third tier.
NEW DESTINATIONS

Lounge area on first tier facing Broad Street; movie screenings from first tier

Ramps from Plaza Tower to second tier lookout and Rooftop Garden
Rooftop Garden:
Including a variety of seating, a small reading library, and a reflecting pool.
SIGNAGE

Example of signage throughout the Kimmel Center to help navigate; electronic paper signage: a new technology that allows for changeable signage that is high resolution, high contrast, and low power.

Example of ‘Today at the Kimmel’ Signage

Today

7:30
Philadelphia Pops
Verizon Hall

1:15
Dance Concert
Commonwealth Plaza

2:45
Go, Go, Go, Joseph!
Perelman Theatre

7:30
Philadelphia Pops
Verizon Hall
THE PROJECT
Connect to the Arts

EXTERIOR

Broad Street Façade:
Draped in electronic paper for event signage, featuring a bench mounted on existing Kimmel sign next to the entrance and bike racks along the sidewalk.

Corner of Spruce and Broad Streets:
An outdoor window to the indoor café featuring affordable food; Hanging mobile illuminated at night activates the corner.

Example bike racks:
Place along sidewalks to promote eco-friendly transportation.
Spruce Street: Cafe tables spill out under new glass overhang

Corner of 15th and Spruce Streets: New entrance

The excitement of this new identity is broadcast onto the exterior of the Kimmel through new glass corner structures surrounding the outdoor cafe and the 15th and Spruce Street corner. A new glass overhang also exists along Spruce Street over the outdoor tables. The main Broad-Spruce corner becomes a beacon during the day and at night due to an illuminated, colorful mobile. We used sustainable principles in every aspect of our design. For example, the exterior of the Kimmel Center is draped with electronic paper, a high quality, low energy technology, announcing daily events and rotating images of local and international shows.
Magnify the experiences of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste to engage, entice and seduce the public. The overarching methodology is to redefine the visitor’s spatial experience by reconsidering and reinterpreting the traditional functions of the vertical walls and horizontal floor through draping and lining the existing structures of the Kimmel.
The Sensory Experience is designed to magnify sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. The stimulation of the five senses will be achieved through several innovative and provocative proposals that we feel will engage the public and make this architectural masterpiece a more personal and dynamic space.
Glass Spiral Staircase

Glass Floors

DESIGN PROCESS

Ideas and sketches for the Cadence Restaurant in Commonwealth Plaza
Starting from the highest point of the Kimmel Center, Hamilton Garden and moving down to Commonwealth Plaza our proposal is to replace the existing floor of the rooftop garden with thick translucent glass, speckled with fiber optic lighting. The elevated glass floor will be the starting point for one of our most innovative suggestions. Beneath the visitor’s feet will be flowing water that will reach the edges of the garden and drape the sides of Perelman Theatre all the way down to Commonwealth Plaza.

Visitors will have the opportunity to enjoy this exciting visual play of lights and water by sitting either on benches lining the edges of the garden or on central mobile seating.
A water wall will flow from below the Rooftop Garden down the eight-story façade of Perelman Theater. The calming sound of the water and the grand elegance of the structure will contribute to the sensual appeal of the space.
GARDEN WALL

A vertical garden that will line the back corner of Perelman Theater and wrap around to the south side of the Kimmel Center across from Verizon Hall. This vertical garden will drape the three tiers with plush, aromatic greenery to fill Commonwealth Plaza with wonderful scents stemming from a range of colorful plants. This area will invite visitors to meet, read and linger.
ROCK WALL

In keeping with the organic nature of our concept our boldest proposal is the installation of an artificial rock-climbing wall that will be installed on the south side of Verizon Hall’s eight-story façade. In the process of revitalizing this space, we wanted not only to engage the senses, but invigorate the entire body with this activity. While strenuous, rock climbing is a quiet and meditative sport that appeals to a wide variety of users. Visitors will experience the excitement of climbing and watching other climbers indulging in this sport. If implemented, the Kimmel Center climbing wall would be among the tallest in the country.

ELEVATOR PODS

Our proposal is to remove both staircases in Commonwealth Plaza and replace them with glass elevator pods with spiral staircases wrapped around them. Additional pod-like structures will allow the visitors to sit in nooks visible from the exterior.
ACTIVITIES

The first and second tiers would offer seating for film screenings that would be projected onto the side of Perelman Theater.

The first tier would feature a glass-floor art gallery to display commissioned pieces by various artists. Visitors would experience the artwork as they travel over it, viewing it through thick translucent glass.

WAYFINDING

In an effort to address the needs the public expressed for a clearer and more visible navigation system we will be implementing signs that will be similar to those of Philadelphia and that will be illuminated on the bottom so that they are easily detectable. Visitors will feel comfortable with this familiar system; and this will contribute to the realization of Commonwealth plaza as a true urban space. Large visible signage on the glass façade of spruce street will be informing pedestrians of the activities that are taking place within the Kimmel Center.
Sensory Experience

TRANSLUCENT FAÇADES

To open a line of vision between the Kimmel's interior and exterior, we have replaced the brick wall of Spruce Street with a glass window, two stories high. This will give pedestrians an opportunity to view the activities and programs taking place inside and welcome anyone who is unfamiliar to step in and take a peek. We have converted a previously restricted space to a dance studio, where performers and the general public can come and practice.

Our plans include the relocation of Cadence Restaurant, which is currently on the second tier, to the northeast corner of Commonwealth Plaza where the ticket booth is currently located. By removing the black granite box on the exterior corner of Broad and Spruce and replacing it with rounded glass we have opened up a line of vision between pedestrians and diners. Customers will be given a wide variety of options to satisfy their appetites and enjoy the wonderful tastes. We have also drawn plans for a wireless café, whose containing large windows that look out onto Spruce Street.
Members of the Philadelphia community gathered in Perelman Theater to review the progress of the Kimmel Center project. Attendees were asked to complete surveys and give their feedback.
The Civic Feedback Session, held on April 14 in the Perelman Theater, provided an opportunity for Penn and UArts students to present their progress to the public. Harris Steinberg and Laurie Churchman began by explaining the design principles developed through public input, and the common concepts generated through initial design exploration. After this introduction, the three groups presented their re-evaluations of the Kimmel Center.

The audience was then divided into breakout groups and asked to give feedback on the ideas they had heard. The reactions from each group were recorded by moderators and surveys were collected that called on the public to answer specific questions regarding the proposals and design principles.

The members of the civic feedback forums represented a wide sampling of the Philadelphia community; from orchestra season ticket holders to neighborhood residents and high school students, everyone who attended was in some way invested in the changes that the Kimmel Center intended to implement. Considering the diverse backgrounds of the attendees, the feedback received at the forum varied greatly. However there were some common themes that arose throughout the evening.

Many people voiced the need for a more welcoming environment to draw in new visitors. Proposals from the presentation addressed this concept with lighted sidewalks surrounding the Kimmel Center’s entrances, more seating, understandable and accessible signage interventions, and the addition of the 15th Street entrance. These were all suggestions upon which nearly every group agreed.

The public responded very well to the design concepts for the Rooftop Garden. The groups agreed that a unique attraction should be implemented in this space in order to give visitors an incentive to travel up eight floors. The public also responded well to the addition of more interesting and available seating, as well as a bar or eating option in this space. Accessibility to the Rooftop Garden was an important consideration, whether via a relocated elevator and/or the Humanize Group’s enormous “destination” staircase.

Some of the larger proposal ideas, such as the eight-story water wall, the expansive vegetation wall, and the Plaza Tower received mixed feedback from the groups. The general consensus was that while these ideas were innovative, many people were apprehensive about the consequences of their specific implementations. For example, they appreciated the idea that the Plaza Tower would act to connect the entire Kimmel Center, but feared that the nature of such a large project would detract from the openness of Commonwealth Plaza.

While some of the bolder, more transformative suggestions were subject to debate, nearly everyone agreed that a quick and relatively inexpensive way to get started on the “new” Kimmel Center was to introduce more programming options. Programming ideas included the introduction of an Internet café, a redesigned or relocated gift shop, and more artistic attractions. The groups were also happy to see designs for outdoor signage that announced daily attractions. They felt that these implementations could be completed relatively quickly and nearly guarantee an increase of traffic into the Kimmel Center.
Ideas were displayed on boards before the presentation; over 200 citizens attended the presentations and participated in small group feedback sessions.
Moderators from the Penn Project for Civic Engagement led groups through a critique of the presented ideas.
MATERIALS & RESULTS
Ideas for the Kimmel Center

By Pete Schulte

The idea of opening up the Kimmel Center to the public comes at a time when the building, known for its grandeur and sophistication, is facing financial challenges. The Kimmel, like many cultural institutions, has been hit hard by the pandemic, leading to decreased attendance and revenue. To address these issues, the Kimmel Center is considering ways to engage the public more directly and create a more vibrant, community-friendly space.

One such idea is to create a public forum area that would function as a beacon for the neighborhood, attracting people to the Kimmel for events and activities outside of performance times. This could include artist residencies, community workshops, and other events that would make the Kimmel a more accessible and welcoming space for the public.

Another idea is to transform the current lobby into a more inviting and interactive space. This could involve adding more seating options, creating more access to the outdoors, and incorporating more art and interactive elements to engage visitors. The goal is to make the Kimmel a more dynamic and engaging place for people who are not currently patrons of the center.

To implement these ideas, the Kimmel Center is seeking input from the public through a survey and a series of focus groups. The goal is to create a more inclusive and vibrant space that reflects the community's needs and values.

By gathering feedback from the public, the Kimmel Center hopes to create a space that truly belongs to the people who live and work in the neighborhood. This will help ensure that the Kimmel remains a vital and active part of the city's cultural fabric for years to come.

Creating a beacon from the top of the Kimmel Center

By Heather Paquin

On Saturday, the Philadelphia Police Department announced the arrest of two people in connection with the stabbing of a woman in the Kimmel Center. The stabbing occurred on Thursday night, leading to a search for suspects.

The stabbing happened just after the arrival of the Kimmel Center's new executive director, Laurie Churchman. As Churchman was making her way across the lobby to the office, she was approached by a man who stabbed her multiple times. Churchman survived the attack and is expected to make a full recovery.

The police are investigating the case and are seeking the public's help in identifying the suspect. The Kimmel Center is working closely with the police department to ensure the safety of all visitors and staff.

To learn more about the Kimmel Center and its initiatives, visit their website at kimmelcenter.org.
A seven-page survey was distributed to the attendees of the public presentation. In six sections, it solicited feedback about the importance of the principles in general, the success of the ideas common to all three groups, the individual group ideas, and finally, the integration of the principles into the design work.
### Importance of the Principles

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<th>Importance</th>
<th>NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT</th>
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<td>WOW! What now?</td>
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<td>Balance aesthetics/commercial appeal</td>
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### Success in Using the Principles

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### Common Ideas

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<td>Activation of Spruce Street</td>
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<td>15th Street entrance</td>
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<td>Rooftop Garden improvements</td>
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### Humanize Proposal

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### Connect Proposal

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<td>Corner café with mobile and public art</td>
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### Sensory Proposal

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<td>Rock climbing wall</td>
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<td>Interactive art and changing exhibits</td>
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While using the public’s feedback about successful elements from the three distinct designs, the students suggested several practical, short-term changes to the Kimmel Center, both structurally and through its programming, that capitalize on its potential as a vibrant urban destination and public space.
This section distills each of the three groups’ designs into a single plan that contains easily implementable initial changes along with the most potent and plausible of the recommended major renovations. Beginning at the corner of Spruce and Broad Streets, we propose removing the exterior black cube and replacing it with a three-story, art-filled atrium. This space may provide additional entrances into the building or may become part of the new café, as shown. Placing some type of café or restaurant in the northeast corner of Commonwealth Plaza, where the ticket booth is currently located, will encourage the public to enter, enjoy, and return to the Kimmel Center. Increasing the façade’s transparency with more glass at the café and along Spruce Street will also make the building and street more alive and inviting.

At the opposite end of the block, at the corner of 15th and Spruce Streets, a new entrance is essential. Opening up this corner and creating an interior corridor will increase accessibility from the west, draw in new visitors, expand Commonwealth Plaza, and provide new usable spaces. The proposed plan illustrates these new spaces being used as an enlarged information center that will serve as a hub for all Avenue of the Arts venues, a relocated Box Office that incorporates exterior sales windows, and a large programmable space directly inside the new entrance. The large space could contain a gift shop, a community dance studio, an interactive lounge (three ideas from the student presentations), or any other function that the Kimmel Center deems appropriate.

Within Commonwealth Plaza, the most effective solution for opening and enlivening the space while retaining its flexibility requires moving the PECO Bar to the corner currently occupied by the stage. The stage will be replaced by a highly visible and adaptable inlaid performance space in the center of the plaza. The public forums and the student analyses also highlighted the importance of better interior design. In response, this proposal includes suggestions for more permanent, unique, and comfortable furniture, as well as an improved main staircase. Interior and exterior signage improvements will also make moving throughout the building easier and more enjoyable.
We envision the Kimmel Center as a place where people can socialize and enjoy both the music of the resident companies and public performances. Our design allows optimal use of all its public space. Empty areas are transformed into flexible areas encouraging visitors to lounge, play interactive games, as well as linger in our new café.
1. Installing a waterwall element underneath the overhang where the existing bar stands will provide ambient sound and add a visual element to the lounge.

2. Stone pedestal tables with illuminated bases complement other uses of lighting in and around the building.

3. Relocating the bar draws visitors further into the lounge.

4. Walls become galleries.

5. Wooden stage inlaid in the floor will become an informal performance space for artists. It can be also built to rotate slowly during performances to give all visitors a great view.

6. Multiple types of seating enable viewing of stage performances and also provide seating for the bar. This seating should also allow for easy movement of foot traffic from the stairs and the plaza.

7. Glass façade provides transparency between the interior and exterior of the Kimmel Center.
In addition to enhancing the public spaces inside the Kimmel Center, we propose several changes along the building’s Spruce Street exterior. A new sidewalk café, a reoriented Spruce Street entrance, and new entrance at 15th and Spruce Streets will help enliven the block, increase transparency, and bring the inside of the Kimmel Center out, and the outside in.
Increase transparency to the building by replacing the existing granite cube with a glass-enclosed volume at the corner of Broad and Spruce Streets.

Bring in visitors with a sidewalk café. A human-scale awning over outdoor tables and an operable glass slider make it a great spot to lounge in nice weather.

Both interior and exterior box office windows will increase sales and ease of picking up tickets.

A new balcony can serve as a rental space for a variety of outdoor events.

Additional entrance at the corner of Spruce and 15th Streets will increase accessibility and entice individuals to enter the Kimmel Center.
New seating throughout the Kimmel Center was selected with the goal of making the building more conducive to sitting and lingering. This meant selecting furniture comfortable enough to make the space more inviting while keeping with the building’s contemporary aesthetic. Other decorative changes, such as the addition of several new planters and, in the long term, a more secure and attractive main staircase, will further enliven Commonwealth Plaza and the upper tiers.
Lit benches will be placed along the periphery of the lounge spaces in Commonwealth Plaza and within the rooftop garden.

Numerous planters will be added throughout the building to dramatically increase the amount of greenery.

Additional seating will be added on each of the upper tiers to make them more conducive for lingering during intermissions or to take in the view of the Kimmel Center’s dramatic vault and impressive views of the city.

More intimate seating niches within Commonwealth Plaza will be created with chic, comfortable furniture.

Sleek wooden seating in the café will lend the new space a sense of elegance fitting for the Kimmel Center.
Implementing consistent and coherent signage throughout the interior and exterior will welcome visitors to the Kimmel Center and help them find their way once inside. Signage will be compatible with the scale of the large space, make use of technology, and complement the existing materials in the building.
Removable films and thin, flexible, low-energy digital screens will promote sustainable practices. An information center with interactive kiosks will encourage visitors to learn more about the Avenue of the Arts.

We recommend the use of supergraphics to identify the main destinations under the vault, as this type of signage will not be overwhelmed by the building’s larger structures.

Free-standing or mounted directories can be used in more specific locations. Lit bases for free-standing signage will ensure that directories are easy to find throughout the building. Slight color and material variations will help distinguish between public and non-public areas.
Digital signage and banners will show daily schedules, publicize upcoming events, and feature video from past and upcoming performers.

Back-lit, touch-sensitive glass sidewalk panels that light up when visitors walk over them will be a great way to draw more foot traffic to the Kimmel Center.

Abundant signage on the exterior will best communicate what is happening inside the Kimmel Center. Supergraphics complement the scale of the building and can identify entrances and programming along Spruce Street.

Abundant signage will show daily schedules, publicize upcoming events, and feature video from past and upcoming performers.
Along with the new design concepts introduced, there are several programming proposals that would promote and invite the public into the Kimmel Center. As a venue for the arts, the Kimmel Center should increase its installation of public art from local artists, occupy the stage with daily performances, and project movies onto the façade of Perelman Theater. A sculptural playground on the Rooftop Garden or a dance studio on Spruce Street would enliven the plaza. In order to transform this arts avenue into a destination, the Kimmel Center can also provide computer stations, Wi-Fi access, a music listening library, and adapt Philadelphia’s tradition of First Friday.
Computer stations and Wi-Fi access to make the Kimmel Center a center for connection and communication.

A music listening library and reading space on the Third Tier serve as spaces to relax or educate the public on the performing arts.

Present weekly movie screenings projected on the façade of Perelman Theater.

A dance studio near the corner of 15th and Spruce Streets will promote performing arts to the public.

Artistic play equipment will allow the Rooftop Garden to transition between a playground and a sculpture garden, introducing activity and attraction.

More commissioned pieces of public art from Philadelphia artists can be featured with frequent rotating installations as well as incorporation of the Kimmel Center as an arts venue during First Friday.

Utilize inlaid stage for daily public performances and as a rentable space when performances are not scheduled.
When the Kimmel Center was originally conceived in 1996, its proponents imagined in the company of such performing arts spaces as New York’s Lincoln Center and Washington’s Kennedy Center. These venues are home to some of the world’s most talented performers, but they are also esteemed cultural destinations within their respective cities. In order to create a similar atmosphere for the Kimmel Center, its designers placed great emphasis on the building as a public plaza as well as a world-class performing arts venue. Architect Rafael Viñoly’s design was modeled after a 19th-century European shopping arcade in order to evoke historical ideas of gathering and community. This notion of the Kimmel Center as a space for the public is an inspiring one, and it has been our hope to realize this vision.

The ideas and designs developed over the past several months represent our vision, derived from the Civic principles, Kimmel staff and professional guidance. Our solutions are given not as finite solution for the Kimmel Center’s public space issues, but as stepping-stones on the path to an eventual resolution. The ideas that we share are meant to spur discussion and debate, and to hopefully lead the public toward a closer understanding of what they imagine the Kimmel Center to be.

This process has not only given all of us the amazing opportunity to work together on the redevelopment of a world-class building, but also a more intimate relationship with the Kimmel Center. We all want to see this space succeed, and have worked hard to ensure that the options provided best represent the desires of the community. With Philadelphia’s continual support and interest, the Kimmel Center will inevitably become the esteemed public plaza that its creators envisioned.
RE-ENVISIONING THE KIMMEL CENTER

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