

principles

SIX DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR THE KIMMEL CENTER

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.

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.

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 attract people—particularly people not now patrons of the resident companies—into its public spaces to linger on a daily basis. 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 uses must be available on a visible, consistent basis—with 'dark' hours kept to a minimum and clearly communicated to the public.

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.

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.

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.

A collaborative effort between the passionate

citizens of Philadelphia and the creative minds

of students at the University of Pennsylvania

and the University of the Arts has opened a

dialogue on how the Kimmel Center's public

spaces can be more vibrant and valuable.

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