

ACSA Collaborative Practice Award

2015-2016 Winner Submission Materials

BEMIS GARDENS

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BEMIS GARDENS

Bemis Gardens was an exhibition and design laboratory organized to transform the Bemis Center's exterior into a public art site and urban garden through innovative community engagement.



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Bemis Gardens was an exhibition and design laboratory organized to transform the Bemis Center's exterior into a public art site and urban garden. The event also served as a forum for speculation on the urban future of the contemporary art center and its relationship with downtown Omaha. In the midst of the Building | Bemis construction process, a \$2.5M project that resulted in a significant expansion of the artist-in-residence program, renovated fabrication facilities and a restored front dock — this exhibition and project series served to initiate a holistic reconsideration of the Center's land use and exterior relationships with the public.

In recent years, artists, architects, ecologists and social designers of all stripes have invested significant energy in forming new hybrids between food production and social space, urban ecologies and public art, forgotten space and material ingenuity, stormwater reclamation and public spectacle. Bemis Gardens was structured as an open laboratory and interactive exhibition. Throughout its three month run the exhibition remained in flux — between the gallery and its exterior, between design process and fabrication, between representation of completed work and installation of site-specific works.



BEMIS GARDENS

The design of Bemis Gardens emerged out of an innovative and risky public process for which the author's firm and students served as both a core participant and "design scribe", developing ideas after weekly charrettes. The Bemis Center hosted a series of charrettes and dialogues throughout the exhibition that convened professionals from diverse fields to consider macro (and micro) urban land use futures and speculate on specific possibilities for the Bemis Center's half urban block of property. The charrettes were intended as open dialogues and the resulted formalized as actionable proposals. This process took place in the gallery and was open to the public in real-time through

lectures, renderings, a blog and the exhibition of fabricated prototypes. At the conclusion of the 12-charrette series and the exhibition's close, the author's team finalized the design of the garden for fabrication and installation by a group of artists and design students.

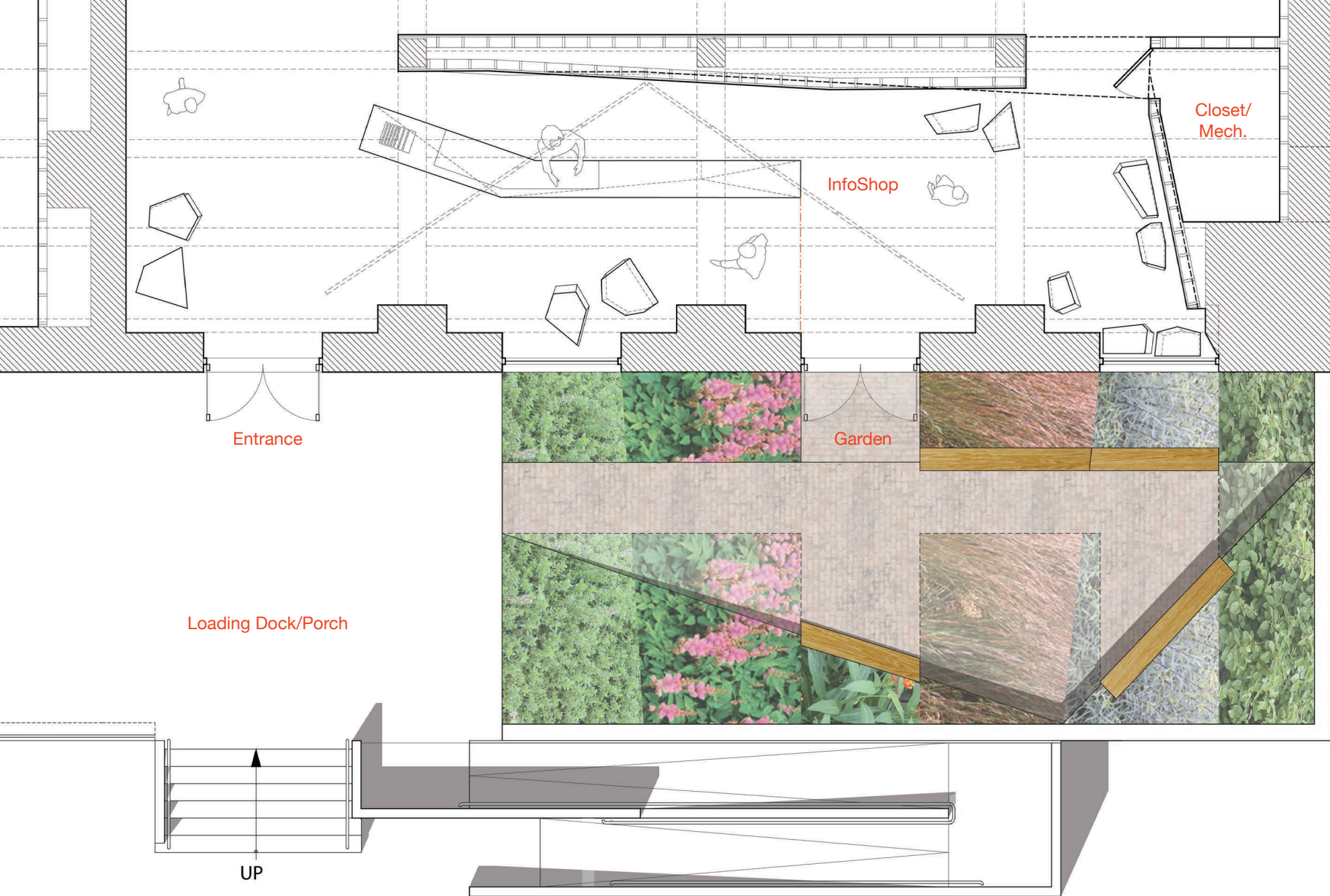
Via Bemis Gardens the old loading dock was rehabilitated as a site for public sculpture, a perennial garden and social platform. Ultimately, the project aims to build model procedural, ecological and aesthetic relationships with the city and to inspire future urban projects through the four goals of education & exhibition, community involvement, local impact and environmental impact.



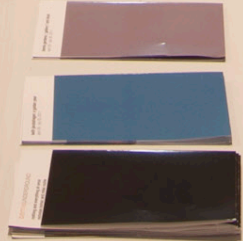
EDUCATION / EXHIBITION

A three month long exhibition was held to educate the community on environmentally and socially sustainable design solutions while also serving as a platform to initiate a holistic reconsideration of the Center's relationships with the public.





The InfoShop (a sister project completed a year earlier) and adjacent garden provide artists and the community with a social platform for spontaneous meetings, dialog and debate.

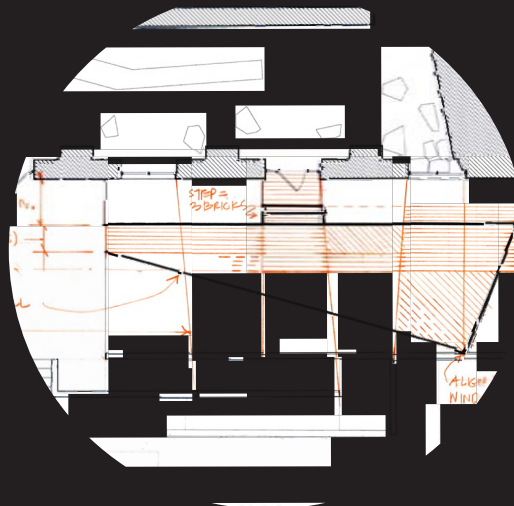






COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Fourteen public design charrettes were held among a diverse group of students, artists, community members and architects. The student-led charrettes were intended as open dialogues and the results formalized as actionable proposals.







LOCAL IMPACT

The exhibition and event series closed with the opening of the garden, the result of the physical labor of local craftspeople, design students, volunteers, and paid interns from underprivileged backgrounds.







ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Made up of 100% recycled, repurposed, and salvaged brick and wood, the Bemis Garden's permeable paving and native, drought resistant plants help to control water runoff on the otherwise post-industrial site.







The completed project functions as an outdoor garden for the Bemis Center and the public. Materials include recycled steel, salvaged brick, crushed recycled brick and native plants.

