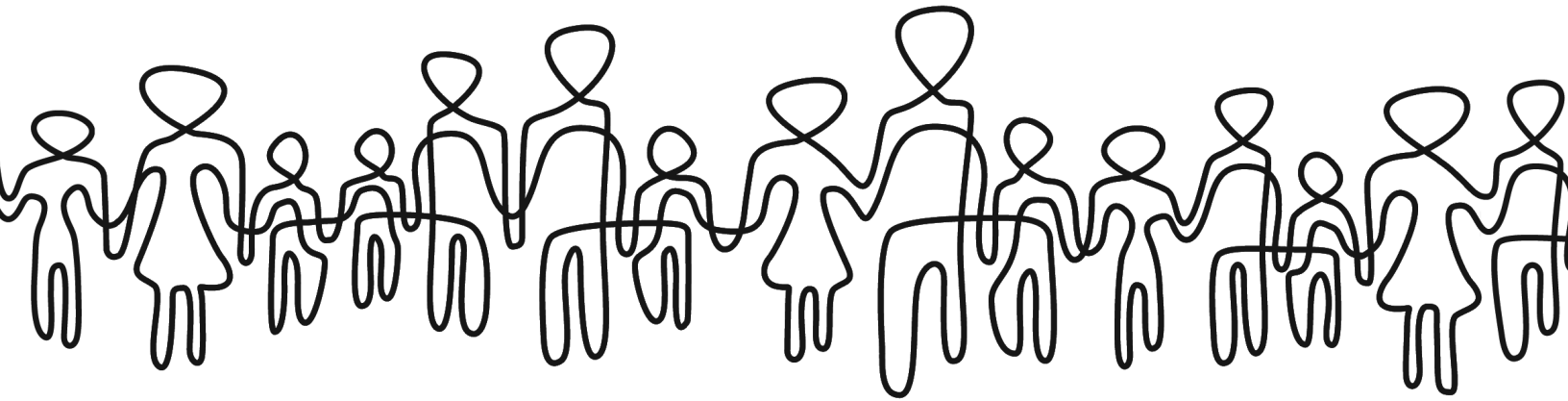


Building Common Ground

Discussions of Community, Civility and Compassion



Guide to Creating Common Ground Tours

Common Ground tours take community members on a curated tour of significant sites that will engage participants in their community's collective memory—places of natural or manmade meaning, beauty or reverence.

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Introduction

Letters of Greeting

Dear Librarian,

If you are reading, you are probably contemplating designing a tour for your community as part of the program Building Common Ground: Discussions of Community, Civility and Compassion, a collaboration between the American Library Association and the Fetzer Institute.

This guide has been designed as a tool to help you through the process of creating a Common Ground tour for people in your community. I hope to equip you for the journey of uncovering and experiencing the significant sites in your community epitomizing “Common Ground.” These sites are markers for collective memory in your local area. They can be natural phenomena or human-built architecture—beautiful and/or historic, modest or magnificent. Some of these sites are public spaces, some privately owned. However, with some advance planning and permissions, even the less accessible sites can be included in your community tour.

Everyday you and your library users walk or drive by significant sites in your local neighborhood, town, or city. Many of these sites have the potential to be included to focus contemplation and conversation. You may find that most of these sites are simply overlooked by nature of their familiarity to their viewer. This guide will help you identify appropriate sites, select which ones and how many to include on your tour, and empower you with a set of best practices about how to create a customized Common Ground tour for your group.

To make it easier for you to create your tour, this guide has been broken down into three main sections:

1. Pre-tour: Preparing for the tour: what to do before you go, and how to plan and coordinate in advance.
2. On the tour: Things to remember when the tour is in progress.
3. Post-tour: After your group completes the tour, how to find ways to decompress and evaluate the sites you’ve seen, engage your tour participants in a meaningful conversation about your collective experience, and preserve this knowledge for your broader community.

Whether you are creating this tour by yourself or collaborating with a local or national expert, I hope you will find this guide useful. This process and program could encourage your group to cultivate conversation and to build common ground within your community.

I wish you all the best of luck in your journey!

Deirdre Colgan, Author
Chicago, Fall 2011

From Mary Davis Fournier? or to be provided by the ALA

Finding and Defining Common Ground

For the purposes of this guide, the following are examples of significant sites you could select for your tour:

- » Civic sites. Engineered structures, secular in nature and scope—usually built by cities, states, or other governmental entities.
- » Landscape sites. Sequestered natural spaces with features found existing in nature or having been cultivated by humans. Could include national parklands, parks, water features, forests, or urban trees—spaces that encourage quiet meditation and pause.
- » Traditional religious spaces. Churches, synagogues, mosques—any architectural site venerated by a particular faith tradition. Usually a house of worship designed and built for a congregation to gather within.
- » Memorial sites. Usually marking an historic event or created to remember a person or group of people. Includes burial grounds, cemeteries, sites of conscience and memory, and sometimes museums.
- » Sacred ground. Indigenous sites extant since before the arrival of Europeans to the American continent. Created by First Nation peoples, many have been damaged or destroyed, but sometimes traces remain visible within the fabric of your contemporary American communities. Often contemporary community structures have been influenced or even defined by underlying sacred ground.
- » A site for art. Public artwork—usually sculpture or murals, which can be highly visible sites within the community. They are commissioned by public or private entities, and sometimes these sites are controversial or misunderstood.
- » Crafted sites. Folk, or intuitive artwork, found in your community created by artisans and/or craftsman. Usually created by local residents, these sites often embody the spirit of the place celebrated in your tour.

Note for users: Every community is unique. Your community could contain other equally interesting and appropriate sites, so trust your feeling about what to include. The list above is meant to get you started as you think about curating a selection of community sites to create your own customized Common Ground tour.

Pre-tour

Site Selection

In addition to using the previous examples of the kind of sites you can include in your Common Ground tour, it's a great idea to customize your particular tour to reflect your local area and/or the issues your Common Ground programs will address.

- » Be inclusive. One way to select sites is to crowdsource suggestions. You could invite input on your selections from library patrons by using a SurveyMonkey.com poll or other voting mechanism. This way you can narrow down or solicit site selections while also engaging potential tour participants. By inviting them to take ownership of the process, even in advance of the tour, you are already building common ground from within your community. This is a great way to spread advance word about the library's upcoming tour.
- » Select a variety of different sites. Include a combination of constructed or human-built architectural sites along with some natural, sculptural, or historic sites in your locality.
- » Choose an appropriate number of sites. Plan to include no less than four and no more than six sites on your Common Ground tour. This will ensure that you have a good variety of types without overwhelming your participants.
- » Set up a pre-registration process. Signing up tour participants in advance will help you to design the tour to suit the size of the group. It will also help you prepare for any special needs your tour participants may have. If they have disabilities, and you know about it in advance, you will be better prepared to accommodate these participants during the tour.
- » Consider the size of your group. The number of people you have participating on your Common Ground tour will affect the kinds of spaces you select to visit. If you have a larger group, for example twenty to forty people, you will need to choose spaces and sites that you know will accommodate many people comfortably. Smaller groups of six to twelve people are suitable for smaller, more intimate spaces. You need to take this into account when you are planning. Preregistration can help with this project. If the number of people is a moving target, have some spaces lined up that could then be winnowed down, if needed, as the group size increases. Then your tour can remain flexible and respond to demand during the sign-up period.

Who Leads the Tour?

There are a few different options for deciding who is going to lead the Common Ground tour. Here are some examples.

- » Librarian: With some advance research, any librarian would be perfectly qualified to lead the tour. You could enlist your library patrons to assist with local site selection while serving as their coordinator and guide. At each place you plan to visit, you can arrange for a director, curator, docent, or staff member to give your group a site-specific tour. This way you can engage local experts on a volunteer basis.
- » Librarian and expert: Co-leadership of the tour is provided by the librarian and a scholar or expert. In this example, the librarian hires someone with expertise and interest in the subject of place and/or space or local history. This could be an architect, historian, senior member of the community, or even a graduate student studying a complimentary subject. Grant funds could be used to cover an honorarium to compensate them for their work. This expert could assist with content preparation for the tour in conjunction with the librarian, who then co-leads the tour with him/her.
- » Expert tour guide. In this case the librarian would commission an expert to completely create the tour. This should be a professional tour guide or an expert as described above,

with guiding expertise either nationally or in the local community. This guide would select the sites, design the content, order and then lead the tour. The librarian could facilitate by coordinating sign-up for the tour through preregistration and also organize advance promotion. This way the librarian could focus on creating programs that could take place in the library to follow the tour.

Duration and Schedule

The total duration of your tour will depend upon the number and type of sites you have chosen. The time you spend at each individual site will vary depending on its size and scale. Their distance from one another will also affect the timeframe of the tour.

- » Take travel time between sites into account. As a general rule of thumb, plan on spending twenty to forty minutes at each site, with fifteen-minute increments in between to reconvene participants and travel to the next site. Test your schedule before the tour to ensure you have left enough time between sites.
- » Consider the order of events. Design the tour schedule to take into account the time of day you will arrive. Depending on their orientation or time of year, some sites may be at their best in the morning or evening. When you are planning the tour, if you are including public/private buildings, ask your hosts if there is a special time of day that highlights aspects of the space. Some types of spaces simply look better in the evening than in the morning and vice versa. Knowing this can help you to organize the order in which you travel to the sites on your tour.
- » Contact your hosts in advance. If you include traditional architectural spaces, schedule ahead with the office to meet and alert them to the fact that you will be bringing a group to the space. This way they can make arrangements to suit your tour. Let the administrators know the size and type of group you are bringing and the nature and goals of your project. Most publically administrated (parks, memorials) and traditional religious spaces are now accessible to people with disabilities, but others need to make advanced arrangements to accommodate any special needs.
- » Take breaks. Allow your group some decompression time between the sites on your tour by factoring in breaks when you are planning the schedule. From a physical standpoint, this is particularly important if there are elderly people in your group. Taking short breaks is a great way to rest between sites and ensures your participants remain engaged for the duration of the tour. The breaks can be an opportunity to plant seeds of conversation within your group that can refer to these anecdotally when the time comes to gather and reflect.
- » Schedule a trial run. Once you have decided upon the spaces you are including, take it on a spin! Enlist library staff or volunteers to take the tour with you. This will ensure that your timing and schedule matches what you estimated, and eliminates surprises on the day. You can also use this trial run to test whether you have the order of sites right.

Mapping—Location Plan

Choosing sites in peripheral locations within your community or selecting sites in close proximity to one another will determine whether or not this is a driving tour.

- » Recognize clusters of spaces situated close by one another. You could focus your tour on visits to a selection of proximate spaces like this, or include a combination of clusters, depending on the length of your tour and your transportation requirements.
- » Intersperse any natural landscape sites—either cultivated or wild—throughout your tour. This allows a built-in rest for your participants between visits to other built monuments and architectural sites.

- » Focus and edit your tour. Remember you can “have it all,” but you might not be able to include everything. If you do, you could end up oversaturating your tour with too many sites. Choose carefully to create quality experiences at a fewer number of sites.

Transportation

Drive or walk? Consider the size and needs of your group when selecting and arranging spaces and transportation. Depending on how many people are in your group, it might be more efficient to provide transportation instead of walking, or vice versa. If you have a larger group and proximity doesn't allow for a walking tour, renting a bus or trolley is good solution.

- » Walking. If you selected a group of sites in a geographic cluster, the chances are you can create a walking tour. In this case, all the sites should be located in an area that is navigable by foot. Your trial run will be a good measure whether or not this is possible during the time frame for your tour.
- » Driving. Logistically, it's difficult to coordinate individuals who bring their own cars. A better idea is to car pool or to allocate funds to hire a shared vehicle if driving is necessary. If you rent a bus or trolley, this vehicle is a great place to distribute any accompanying material you have created to participants. If you have engaged an expert or guide, together you can use this as a venue to provide your group with introductory remarks and other information. If driving is an option, be sure to include information about site parking in advance to tour registrants.
- » Public transportation. We generally do not recommend public transportation for group tours, but if it's appropriate for your community, it can be a great way to reduce costs.

Research

After selecting the spaces you have decided to visit, research their histories, traditions, and even controversies, if applicable.

- » Engage local experts. This is key. Whether they accompany you and your group on the tour or not, you can still pick the brains of someone who really knows a particular site well. This expert could be a historian, architect, planner, docent, expert volunteer, or other scholar, or even a former or current government official. If the site is a contemporary building or artwork designed by a local architect or artist, it's a great idea to speak to them during your advance research in order to learn about their design. You could also approach them about joining your group during the visit to that site, and/or ask them about participating in post-tour programs.
- » Arrange for a greeter. We recommend having a staff person or expert volunteer greet the group when it arrives, someone who will be willing to address questions about their space from your tour participants. Oftentimes the people who work or take care of the architectural sites on your tour are a great resource for information and research, so use them! This kind of direct knowledge from people who work or use the space will imbue your tour with experiential knowledge.
- » Create tour materials. If you are engaging an expert to assist you or lead the tour, arrange for them to provide informational materials that can be distributed as handouts to your tour participants. This material can serve as research on the fly. Encourage tour participants to use it to generate questions and inquiry. As leader of the tour, you can facilitate this process during travel between the tour sites—while walking, or while riding in the bus or trolley, if this is a driving tour.

On the Tour

Dos and Don'ts

If you are including memorial sites (war memorials), spaces of cultural significance (burial grounds), and/or traditional houses of worship on your Common Ground tour, it's a good idea to educate your group about how they should behave when in these kinds of spaces. Here is a list of tips for what your group should do—and not do—during the tour.

Do

- » Require digital device silence. Make an announcement before entering the space and tell all the members of your group to check that their phones and other electronic devices are off. There is nothing worse than an interruption caused by a ringtone—this noise also spoils the experience for other people in the space. Be mindful that you are responsible for the behavior of your group while you are in the space. Reminding your group of this will avoid this noise faux pas. Don't forget to turn off your own phone, too, or at least make sure it's on silent mode.
- » Check in. Introduce yourself and ask a site “insider” to greet you. This could be a member of the staff, docent, or volunteer who can orient your group when you first arrive. Make sure they know whom you are and how long you will be in the space. This gives your host a chance to introduce their space and answer questions.
- » Be respectful and quiet, knowing that many of these spaces will have special meaning for people who come here to reflect, observe, mourn, remember, worship, or to connect with themselves and the world beyond.
- » Ask in advance whether photography is allowed, and announce this information to your group at every site. Using a camera is a wonderful way to document your experience; however, it may not be appropriate at some sites, and in general it is not acceptable to photograph individuals as they worship, reflect, or mourn without their permission. Sometimes within some older, historic spaces, where there are fragile artifacts, flash photography is not allowed.
- » Find out about dress codes. Familiarize yourself with any dress requirements for the various sites included on your tour. For example, if you include a local mosque as a site, women will be most likely expected to cover their hair. Advance knowledge of this requirement will mean your tour participants come prepared. As a general rule of thumb, show respect by having your group dress modestly before entering places of worship.
- » Obey posted signs. Many cultural, religious, and curated sites will have spaces designated as off-limits to the general public for a variety of reasons. As you are vetting potential sites, observe whether there are restricted areas that you may want to invite your group to experience (such as upper architectural features, sacred spaces) and seek advance permission for access. Some spaces will allow this access, while others may not. For the safety of your group, do not assume that it's ok to roam throughout the space.
- » Be aware of your surroundings and tell your group to do the same. Keep track of your groups' belongings and relay that it's not a good idea to leave items unattended. Unfortunately, with the closure of many social service centers in cities, especially in the urban areas, many traditional sacred spaces, like libraries, have become de facto shelters for the homeless and mentally ill. Encourage caution and common sense, as you would in any city or civic public space.

Don't

- » Eat, drink, or bring food inside a tour space. Eating and drinking are prohibited in most curated spaces or places of worship.

- » Assume everyone in the space wants a tour. Be respectful to other visitors and people while you are there, especially those experiencing the space. Choose an unobtrusive place to present to your group so as not to interfere with the experience of other users.
- » Trespass. Be aware that even though the public can enter a space, there may be areas within the space that are off-limits. For example, some public art may be suitable for handling, while other objects may be restricted; certain faith traditions may not allow visitors to step on the altar or other liturgical areas.
- » Encourage loud conversations and fast movements. Modulate your voice and movement to the requirements of the space, and ask your tour participants to do the same.
- » Assume your tour's right to be there takes precedence over the use of the space by others. You and your group are invited guests, and it is appropriate that you act accordingly and defer to your hosts.
- » Allow your group to block passage for other people or otherwise get in the way. Try to situate your group so that you are as unobtrusive as possible to others within the space. Seek recommendations or assistance from the host site for routing your tour through the space.

Underlying Design Principles

- » Remember the underlying criteria for design and layout. Bring your group's awareness to both the form of a given site—its architecture or structure and its materiality and decoration—and to the site's function, whether the site you're visiting is natural or constructed by humans. Considering the connections between function and form is a great tool for engagement.
- » Consider how some of these sites may have been built originally for another purpose and have since been adapted and reused. Ask your group, How was this achieved? Is the change successful?
- » Bring your group's awareness to monuments and sites of conscience that mark events some would prefer to forget. By including these sometimes forgotten histories in the physical space selected for the tour, you can create windows for conversation about the current community issues or concerns.
- » Design and organize the order of the tour with your guide before you arrive at a particular site. Share the itinerary with your tour participants in advance while traveling between the spaces or before the tour begins. This way everyone will know what to expect when they are on the tour, especially before entering a larger, more encompassing site.
- » Break it down. Make sure there is enough time at each of the sites on your tour for people to wander around the space, investigating details and gaining an overall sense of the space. Breaking down into smaller groups makes the tour less invasive within the space than a large clump. Have your group reconvene in an area like the entry at a pre-assigned time.
- » Arrange for a welcoming party. If appropriate, arrange for a site representative—ideally, someone from the space you are visiting—to welcome the tour participants when your group arrives. This is also a good place to make preparatory remarks before you orient your group in the right direction.

Some Notes on Just Being

- » Sometimes the context and physical experience of a Common Ground site may be overwhelming. Instead of taking out cameras to record their experience right away, recommend individuals in your group find a place to sit down or stand quietly and simply experience the space before going any further. Your group may need to be reminded of this at every site.

- » Most traditional architectural spaces, whether religious or civic, have somewhere to sit down comfortably. It could be on a chair, a pew, a bench, the ground, or even a rock. Allow your group to “just be” in the space—even if it’s for a few minutes. Quieting down and observing how you are all affected by being in this space could be the most important thing you do during your visit. After a few moments of quiet contemplation, your group can set about recording their experience through photography, if appropriate—and referring to the materials you have supplied in advance.
- » It’s tempting to feel like you are on a treadmill—trying to time your visits so that you can cover all the spaces on your tour. If you plan in advance, according to the instructions in the pre-tour section, you can give yourself permission to relax and enjoy the tour! Your participants will pick up on this and also relax. Building in this down-time at each site means your group can enjoy a primary experience within each site. You can create opportunities to intellectualize and analyze after your group completes the tour by scheduling group debriefings, lectures, or online forums. Unless this time is built into your schedule, it can fall by the wayside. Everybody on the tour will have a better experience if they are allowed some time to just be in the space.

Engagement and Reflection

The following section contains “things to notice” questions. These may assist both tour leaders and participants with the site experience. You may wish to distribute a selection of the following questions in advance to tour registrants and bring handouts for distribution on site. It’s a good idea to reference these questions after your introductory remarks when the tour begins. Some people find it easier to engage when they are occupied like this. You may wish to pair tour participants to discuss questions as an icebreaker for people on the tour that may not know one another. Considering these questions while they experience the space will leave tour participants better prepared to discuss their experience afterwards. If your tour is being facilitated by a site representative or external scholar, you may wish to use the following questions as a starting point to creating additional questions or discussion content.

Things to Notice

- » Context. How does the space fit within the environment in which it is located? Is it in a dense urban environment, sharing its space with many other buildings? Or is it freestanding on its own block? Consider whether it is on the corner or bordered by a public square or plaza.
- » Structure. What is the underlying structure of the site? If it’s a building, how is it held up? How does the structure assist or impede its function? Have your group observe the structure, from the exterior of the space, and then from the interior. Sometimes there are great differences between the two.
- » Orientation. What direction is the site facing? Is there a direction defining the placement of elements within it? For example, landscapes where there is more sun or shade, or the altar or windows of a traditional religious space. Is the space aligned with the underlying organization of surrounding community? If so, does its orientation deviate from the regular grid or layout? For example, is it oriented directly north-south? Or is it “off the grid?”
- » Appearance. How does the site sit within the community? Is it forbidding? Welcoming? Imposing? Does it dominate its location, or sit quietly within it? What kind of façade or face does the site or space present to the public? Is it highly ornamented on the outside, or simple and streamlined?
- » Materiality. What kinds of materials are found here? Are they local, from the surrounding area, or were they brought here from far away? Is there fine craftsmanship apparent?

Or is there a sense of utilitarianism—plain, simple, and functional? If natural, how have humans left their mark on this space or altered it over time? What are the signs of this?

- » Purpose. What was the original purpose of this space? Has it been repurposed or adapted to serve a different use? Was it once another kind of building or space, and, if so, how can you tell?
- » Light. What is the source of light for the site, and how does it enter? Are there areas of light and dark? Can you see the outside from within? Do you feel connected with the sky, or is this a grounding, earth-bound space?
- » Sound. How have the materials chosen for the site affected the quality of sounds within? Is it loud and echoing? Or silent and hushed? Are you inclined to whisper or lower your voice? Why is this?
- » Pattern and layout. Is there a visible center or focus apparent in the space? Is the space symmetrical or off-balance? Or does it appear to be haphazard or random or severely organized? Imagine looking down from above—are the paths to or through this site straight, or soft and winding?
- » Symbolism. Are there any symbols visible in the sites you visit? Are these reminiscent of anything you've seen before? Sometimes when no water is available, sand or grains are used to infer its presence. Some symbols are more obvious, and you can research what they mean during your advance preparation. Are there any images, words, or other elements visible within the space?
- » Connection. Some sites are designed to remind us of the connection between above and below. Do you see any visible connection between sky and earth? Do you feel reminded and grounded within the community you came from? Or does this site transport you elsewhere?
- » Recognition. How do you feel now that you are here in this space? Why do you think this site could be considered "Common Ground"?
- » Debrief and process. Extend an invitation to your group to attend a post-tour conversation and/or other related programs, letting them know there will be opportunity to share what they experienced with one another and with others from your local community.

Post-tour

Encouraging Conversation

- » Design a post-tour discussion about your collective experience on the tour. Invite your expert(s) and people you may have met along the way to convene with your group. Open the invitation to people who may not have come on the tour but want to hear more about building common ground.
- » Create a comfortable space for conversation. It is important that people feel comfortable before they can have a proper conversation. You can help to set the stage for this by serving as a mediator. It's up to you to engage your architectural expert or docent and your group members to encourage conversation. Opening up this process to other people who weren't on the tour can expand the discussion beyond the group throughout your community.
- » Give your tour participants permission to ask "stupid" questions. Simply stating that there is no such thing as a dumb question tends to free people up from being embarrassed or ashamed about a lack of knowledge before they share.
- » If you are unsure what to talk about or how to begin, use the list of "things to notice" questions to kick things off, and the conversation will snowball. Remember the people who completed the tour are now newly minted experts in their own right! Give them permission to share what the experience was like for them with others. First let the extroverts respond, and then invite quieter participants to also share. By recalling what they learned for the others present, especially those who were not on the tour, they can educate and bring awareness about these sites to your general community. This is a great way to build common ground.
- » Here are some other ideas for initiating conversation: Ask questions yourself, or have library colleagues or friends ask "pre-considered" questions to get things started. Don't be afraid of silence. Often people need some time to process and think before responding to a question. Invite dissent. Be respectful and open to diverse points of view, and you will help people feel comfortable contributing.

Following Up—Processing

- » Journaling. After the tour, a great way help your group process their experience is to encourage them to write about it in a personal journal. This reflection means remembering and marking their own experiences at the various sites and putting those down on paper.
- » Exhibiting or presenting. You could request submissions of writings excerpted from these journal entries, and ask for permission to share these with people beyond your group. You could use these to mount a display about the tour, also collecting photographs and images taken by your group, or ask tour participants to recall their experience by presenting publically. This process then preserves the individual memories within your collective experience, and shares those with your broader community.
- » Recording. You can capture the stories that have been generated by your tour in the form of oral histories. Engaging volunteers to transcribe these stories is a great way to gain cultural knowledge for your community from within the community itself. The final product could be anything: a book, recording, or even a video production. For additional tips on oral history and memory projects, see the Resources page on the Building Common Ground website (<http://ppo.ala.org/commonground/resources>).

Credits and Acknowledgements

About the Author

Deirdre Colgan is a practicing artist, trained as an architect. She has an eclectic consulting practice under the moniker *hybridesign*. From August 2008–October 2010 she served as Executive Director of the Chicago-based architecture nonprofit Sacred Space International. During that time she, along with a team of architects and designers, created a series of eight City Guides to Sacred Spaces to accompany the PBS series *God in America*.

She regularly presents architectural and other specialist material to a variety of public audiences, from lectures and tours to panel discussions. She currently serves on the board of Chicago Women in Architecture Foundation. Colgan holds a Masters of Architecture from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and a Masters in Fine Art, Sculpture from the California College of the Arts. Her Bachelors Degree is from the National College of Art and Design in Ireland. She has practiced as an architectural professional since 1999, and has served as adjunct faculty at a number of academic institutions. A native of Dublin, Ireland, Deirdre currently calls the city of Chicago home. Previously she has lived in Taos, New Mexico, and San Francisco. To complete her MFA thesis “The Living Space,” she traveled to Tokyo and Kyoto to experience Japanese concepts of space. In 2008, Deirdre was a co-grantee of the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in Fine Arts. She and her brother, independent producer and journalist Jim Colgan, traveled together to France to research and investigate the status of the house designed by Eileen Gray: E.1027.

Her current practice is concerned with sequestering spiritual space among the tumult of everyday life, and her methods lie somewhere between art and architecture. She is a founding member of the artist-run collective Studio 3D, located in Chicago’s West Loop neighborhood.

Designer: ***INSERT NAME & INFO ABOUT DESIGNER HERE***

Editor: Mary Davis Fournier? MDF-do you need this credit here?!

Acknowledgement:

*****SPACE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL LOGOS, SPONSORS, FUNDERS ETC.*****

