

MassArt Treehouse

Carli Dantas

The MassArt Treehouse, located at 578 Huntington Avenue, was completed in the Fall of 2012 for Massachusetts College of Art and Design. The design for this dormitory building was inspired by a painting by the Austrian symbolist painter Gustav Klimt, entitled *Tree Of Life* (1905). Add Inc. architects used the painting to create a vibrant exterior through the use of aluminum panels of varying depths and hues. The resulting, dynamic façade functions as a landmark for the neighborhood as well as the Boston skyline. The organic nature of the panel pattern mimics the painting itself. The dark browns at the base of the residence hall emulate tree bark before growing progressively lighter as the building rises higher. The green window panels break the brown tones of the façade to represent the leaves of a tree.

The interior spaces also take inspiration from the painting by using a bold color palette to create a stimulating environment, just as the painting's variety of color engages an observer. The first floor serves not only the students of MassArt, but also the students of Wentworth and MCPHSU, with a café and lounge area. The third floor becomes exclusive to the students living within the residence hall. Located on this floor, known as the "pj floor", is a game room, a group study room, laundry, a fitness center, and a community kitchen. Floors 4-20 house 493 students.

At first sight the 21-story exterior towers over the existing buildings, but its warm brown tones link the architecture to the existing historic homes and buildings of the Fenway and Mission Hill. The use of aluminum panels, a contemporary material, allows this color palette to be reimaged for Boston's contemporary cityscape. The site itself is small, measuring only 55 feet by 125 feet or 6,850 sf, which provided some challenges and design limitations. The building is tall and slender to accommodate for the lot size, which





means that all the spaces created within the 21 stories (20 useable) had to be utilized to their greatest potential.

The building was imagined with the collaboration of students, faculty and the surrounding community. Add Inc. facilitated a focus group of 85 participants, including many students in the architecture and interior design programs. The firm developed full-scale mock-up units for the participants to explore and critique, thus not only helping them develop the building, but also giving these students real world experience in their chosen field.

The involvement of the MassArt community was a huge factor in the design of the Treehouse building. An interior design class at MassArt designed the first floor lobby furniture, while a graphic design class developed the logo for the Spoon Café. MassArt faculty, alumni, and even current students created all the artwork in the building.

Overall, the faculty and students involvement make this residence hall truly unique to MassArt.