



FORMOSA

A Comprehensive Preservation Master Plan

Historic Landscape Restoration Plan

Elisabet Ney Museum

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historic Formosa, the Elisabet Ney Museum, was the studio of German-born sculptor Elisabet Ney (1833-1907). Ney immigrated to Texas in 1873 and established her studio, Formosa, in Austin in 1892. From its grounds she produced some of her best known works including *Sam Houston* and *Stephen F. Austin*. This block-sized property located in Hyde Park, a historic neighborhood of Austin, Texas, covers 2.452 acres and is framed by the surrounding city streets. One of the oldest museums in Texas, the Elisabet Ney Museum property invites people of all ages to “renew their links with the past” as experienced in the place, works and spirit of Elisabet Ney as well as her heroes, colleagues, and influences.

Over the years, changes were made to this unique property. Landscape efforts in the 1930s and in the 1960s were well intended but changed the character of the landscape transforming it into a tended garden setting. The landscape of Texas prairie, paths and vegetable garden cultivated by Ney for her studio is unique in character and documented in a series of historic photographs that capture both the feeling and the details of the place. Ney’s landscape embodies both the choices of the artist owner and the characteristics of early development of Hyde Park. The landscape of the property today does not convey these unique and distinctive Ney era characteristics. A recapture of Elisabet Ney’s studio landscape that was an integral part of Formosa both in design and use is recommended and presented in detail herein.

FORMOSA: A COMPREHENSIVE PRESERVATION MASTER PLAN, HISTORIC LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PLAN follows the format of a Cultural Landscape Report providing the required historic and contemporary documentation, analysis and recommendations for landscape restoration recommendations to preserve and present the Formosa landscape. While the direction is to return to the landscape of Ney’s design, at the same time functional aspects of the landscape, to include access, interpretation, sustainability and maintainability, need to be resolved. The landscape will simultaneously respond to maintenance and service needs, local codes, and access and safety concerns. The objective in addressing these contemporary issues is to fit these valid current concerns appropriately into the historic landscape without compromising historic character or extant historic features.

The museum must function effectively everyday in a sustainable manner bringing the educational and interpretive content of this special place to its visitors. The planning approach to the Formosa landscape treatment establishes a platform for interpretation of the landscape history, character and Elisabet Ney’s aesthetic. The interpretive media and messages draw on the historic documentation with the intent of

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engaging and informing the visitor. The interpretive approach for a restored Formosa landscape will consider the history of the landscape within the context of Ney's philosophy, lifestyle and artistic endeavors. The objectives for Formosa, the Elisabet Ney Museum, are to provide a richer, more engaging and authentic visitor experience of the former studio of Elisabet Ney. Applying a Restoration approach to the Formosa property will provide a rich landscape for interpretation through direct experience of the landscape and Ney's design aesthetic and potentially through a range of appropriate methods and media in formats that suit school groups, families, individuals and tourists through enhanced programming. The expanded programming envisioned to support the restored property will include interpretive materials, self-guided and guided landscape tours, and perhaps downloadable audiovisual programs. This varied presentation will insure that the visitor experiences the historic landscape, the building, the entire site including most especially the creek; in short, ***Formosa***.

Over time, as implementation proceeds in phases, the fully realized historic landscape restoration will recapture, in three-dimensional multi-sensory detail, the landscape of Elisabet Ney. Support, from both public and private sources will be needed to recapture this unique place, carpeted with grasses and wildflowers, shaded by a few grand post oaks, and dotted with new, small trees as it was in Ney's time. Lake Ney, an integral feature of the Formosa property, is recommended for recapture of the historic alignment as a widened creek bed to the full degree possible. Dry for most of the year, during storm events the water will fill this widened creek bed depicting temporarily the Lake Ney scene of pre-1898 before the City of Austin made Ney breach the Lake Ney dam, while providing additional storm water capture and easing Waller Creek storm surges and flooding. From 1898 to Ney's death in 1907, the wide dry creek was a scenic landscape element, with occasional high water during and immediately after storm events. The proposed approach seeks to recapture that 1898 to 1907 appearance to the extent possible within current watershed and storm water management issues. Bounded by a rural post and wire fence, the property will be striking in its evocation of an earlier time. In the first phase, the south landscape will be recaptured with the area extending between Avenues G and H and 44th Street and Waller Creek returned to prairie, trees planted and paths reconstructed in historic locations, historic wire fence installed and the Waller Creek south edge regraded and planted. Future work will focus on creek widening, north prairie planting, Lodge rehabilitation, new bridge construction and 44th Street frontage parking clarification as approvals and combined public and private funding are secured. **This restored landscape will honor the life and work of Elisabet Ney while providing a unique, engaging historic place for the enjoyment and education of visitors of all ages and interests.**