



# FORMOSA

## A Comprehensive Preservation Master Plan

Architectural Restoration Plan

Elisabet Ney Museum

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

***“Shall not our surroundings thereby become transformed into scenes beautiful to behold and ennobling to move among? Shall not our dwellings, our public buildings, our factories, our gardens, our parks reflect the loveliness of our artistic dreams? “***

*Elisabet Ney, 1833-1907*

Elisabet Ney’s own words from her 1895 writings are a call to action to restore and renew Formosa! She designed, sculpted, and lived at Formosa for the last 15 years of her life. Originally built on a four-acre site on the edge of Austin that Elisabet Ney purposely selected for its “remote, romantic” qualities, the building as it rests today is as much an artifact and representation of her life as any of her sculptures, and has remained relatively unaltered since her death. Her vision of Formosa, as an integrated composition of building and landscape, relies on the natural beauty of the site, which is also in need of restoration.

The Elisabet Ney Museum’s interpretive style is naturalistic with few modern interventions between the visitor and his or her experience. Formosa is the embodiment of the rustic, romantic, and idealistic tenets by which Ms. Ney lived, and as such, the approach to the building should be interpreted as that of an artifact of her life and philosophical ideals. She purposefully constructed only what she needed to carry out her work, and conducted most of her social interactions on the grounds. Consequently, the total space of the building is minimal- shrinking and swelling from the dimly lit intimate entry spaces to the sun splashed voluminous studio spaces, with little interior space for everyday living. The building design is a tangible display of her understanding of the design elements of mass, scale, rhythm, and light.

It is clear that many of the character-defining features of the building, from the handrails and posts made of cedar branches to the open loft above her main studio space, do not meet modern-day life safety and accessibility codes. Care must be taken to delicately balance the needs of safety, accessibility, and consequential modern interventions with a **respect and appreciation for her original design intent**. The design approach is to conserve the building *in situ*, and replace later modifications where necessary in order to improve the preservation of the original building materials.

Several critical needs have been identified at the historic building which require immediate attention:

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- A new roof and scupper system must be installed to halt recently active water infiltration.
- Long-standing poor subgrade drainage at the north elevation must be corrected with a new foundation drain system that will accommodate the existing nearby high flood plain. This must be done to stabilize the foundation upon which every thing else rests.
- Related to previous roof scupper failures and poor subgrade drainage, severely deteriorated plaster in several areas must be removed from the building to allow the masonry substrate to gradually dry out and stabilize. Severely rotted wood at ceilings adjacent to the scupper failures must be replaced.
- Modifications to the current mechanical and electrical systems should be made concurrent with the roof work, including the introduction of fresh air into the system and improved humidity control to protect the irreplaceable contents of the museum.

Priority Two essential work includes:

- Masonry restoration, including cleaning and limited repointing, must be completed in accordance with established building restoration standards.
- Wood rot and termite damage at the windows and doors must be eliminated using appropriate wood conservation techniques. Particular areas of wood flooring must be reinforced and refinished to provide additional support and correct previous damage.
- Modern interventions should be removed or, where necessary for safety, replaced with more transparent materials in order to maintain respect for the original artists' intent.
- Historic plaster and most wood finishes within the studio must be restored to their original appearance and the artists' intent.
- Modern building system interventions such as interior climate and controls, lighting, plumbing, and audio visual systems must be reevaluated and replaced as necessary to improve the conservation of historic materials, energy efficiency and visitor experience.
- Appropriate signage and trained docents should alert visitors to the rustic character of the building, potential hazards and reasonable precautions one should exercise.
- The form of the original barn and servant's home should be reconstructed to hold accessible public restrooms, curatorial facilities, a meeting space, and staff offices.
- The landscape restoration must be carefully coordinated to solve the critical issues of poor drainage and accessibility to the building.

This entire restoration program must be implemented in order to halt deterioration and conserve original building material. Proposed conservation, restoration, and intervention treatments defined herein are designed to support and augment the mission of the organization to enhance the visitor experience and the understanding of Ney's legacy.

Elisabet Ney's studio home is the embodiment of her ideals, integrated with the landscape, that holds and protects a unique and priceless collection her life works. The overarching goal of this plan is to take the greatest care to preserve the original grace and beauty of this unique national treasure.