

Room Within

Artists: Merge Conceptual Design

2016

Valley Transit Authority Light Rail, San Jose, CA / Council District 3, 5, 6, 8, and 10

ABOUT THE PROJECT

A series of art and design enhancements is an important feature of the Alum Rock/Santa Clara Bus Rapid Transit Project.

Art reinforces the identity of the transit line while strengthening the unique character of the stations as neighborhood landmarks. The artworks contribute to the vibrancy of the cityscape, promote neighborhood pride and create engaging experiences for pedestrians and transit users alike.

ABOUT THE PROCESS

The artists explored the transit corridor and surrounding neighborhoods by bus, car, and on foot as well by delving into historical archives and through an intensive community engagement process.

Local residents participated in more than 15 stakeholder community meetings that led to the artists following-up with people throughout the corridor. On behalf of the project, Merge involved local artist Corinne Takara who collaborated on local research and outreach, and engaged 12 elementary school classrooms with close to 400 students.

Through this process story lines emerged, that are unique to each station. The artists looked for stories that are both representative and at the same time not necessarily widely known in the context of each station.

THE ARTWORK

The station art seeks to maximize visual impact by the creation of a distinct “Room within a Room” within each shelter, an area that stands out within the overall station architecture through treatment with color, texture, and pattern, and gives identity to each specific station. While the patterns vary from station to station, the architectural elements that carry the patterns remain constant and form the framework for the interventions: artistic treatments were applied to windscreens, paving and ceiling elements within the “Room within a Room” area.

Each station pair – Eastbound and Westbound stations – shares a dominant color as a background to the patterns. This helps orient passengers on the bus system, and serves as an additional landmark.

Arena Eastbound

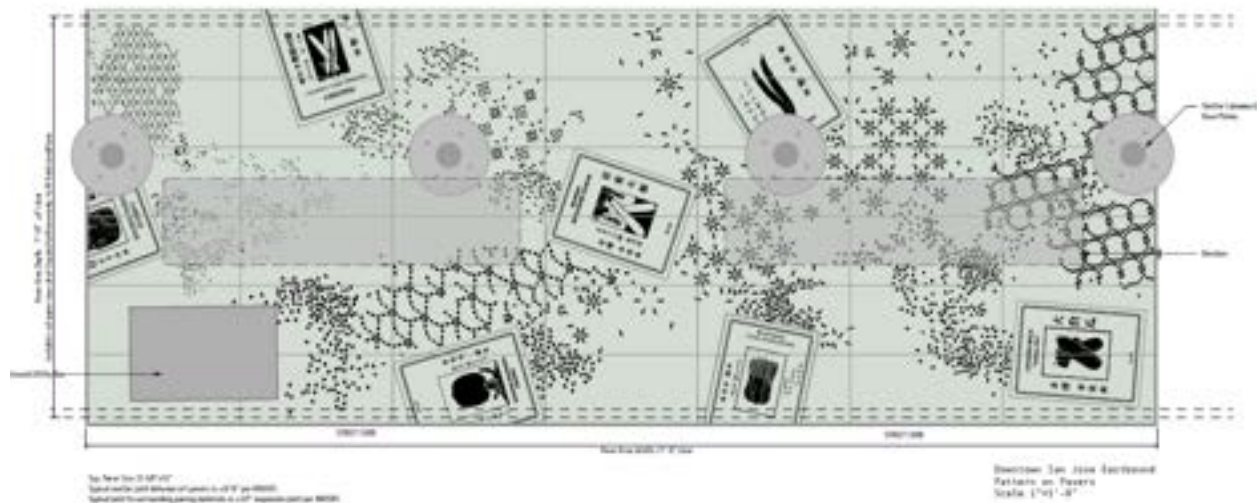
Inspired by skate traces and puck scuff marks created by San Jose Sharks hockey players, the windscreen is a montage based on photographs of the ice and the textures of the surrounding rink, taken after a Shark's hockey practice. A hockey puck skips across the ceiling panels. The paving pattern is marked with figure skating's [classic school figures](#), referencing figure skating competitions that are also hosted at the arena.



Downtown Eastbound

Representing San Jose's history of agricultural innovation, the paving pattern is inspired by historic seed packet designs from [Kitazawa Seed Co.](#), America's first seed company founded in San Jose in 1917 and originally located on North Market Street in proximity to the BRT station. From 1942 to 1945 Kitazawa Seed Company was forced close due to WWII. The Kitazawa family, along with all other Japanese-Americans, were moved and put into relocation camps during that time. After the war Kitazawa Seed Company began selling and shipping seeds across the United States.

Credit: Images of Seed Packages provided by California History Center Foundation, De Anza College, Cupertino, CA; images used with additional permission from Kitazawa Seed Company.

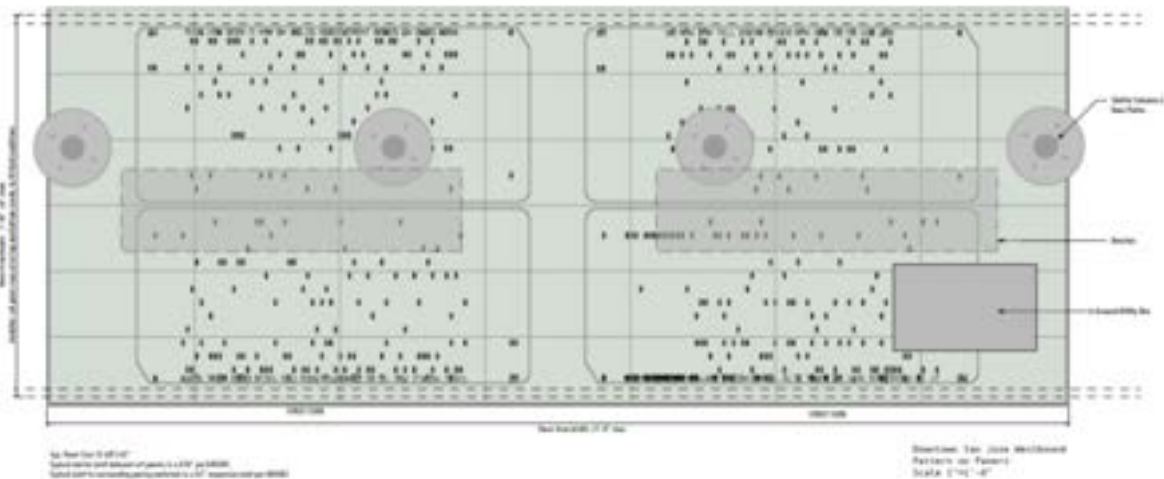


Downtown Westbound

This station's art is inspired by RAMAC, the world's first hard disk drive, developed in 1956 by a small research laboratory that was part of IBM. The lab was located on Notre Dame Street, close to the BRT station. The [punch cards](#) in the paving pattern show the first four messages ever read back

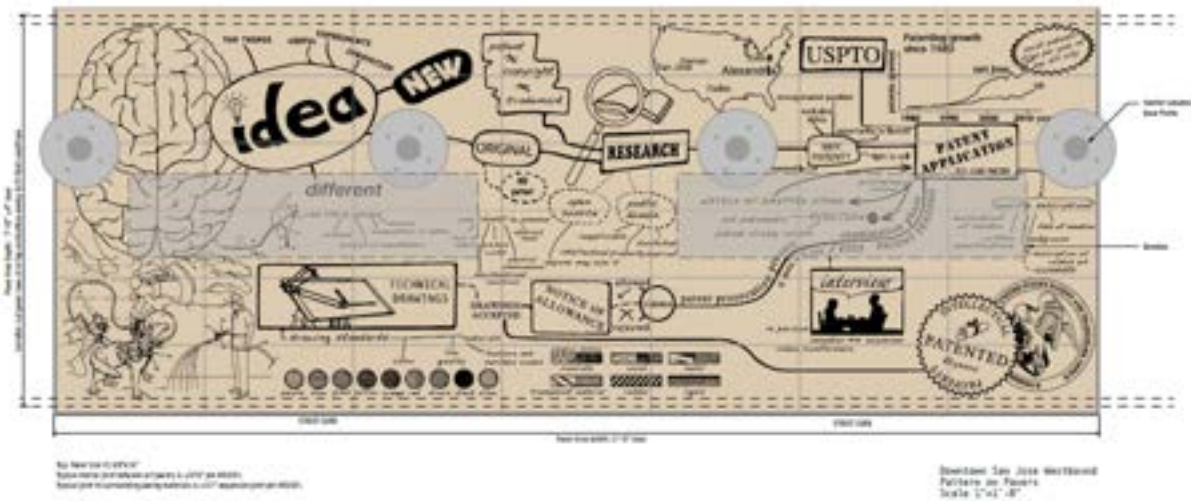
from a hard drive. These were registered through a punch card mechanism, since this was a time before computer screens.

Credit: Information provided by Dave Bennet and Dag Spicer, Computer History Museum, Mountain View, CA



City Hall Eastbound

The Silicon Valley U.S. Patent and Trademark Office opened in 2015 at City Hall to tap into Silicon Valley’s innovative culture and technical expertise- San Jose had the highest number of patents filed by any US city in recent years. A collage that illustrates the logistical process of filing a patent, as well as patent drawing conventions, forms the basis of this pattern.



17th Street Eastbound

The patterns at this station was inspired by American Dairy, formerly located at 17th & Santa Clara Streets. This was one of the many local dairies in the 1930s, until the industry declined with the suburbanization of the area. American Dairy closed in 1960. The windscreen is a collage composed of an historic photograph of American Dairy and related artifacts including their sign as it existed on 17th and Santa Clara. Doilies adorn the ceiling and pavers are embossed with milk bottle seals and caps from San Jose’s historic dairies.

Credit: Images courtesy of History San José



17th Street Westbound

Art patterns have been inspired by artifacts of Vietnamese, Portuguese and Mexican games played in this ethnically mixed neighborhood. The game images represented were recorded in the community: Vietnamese [Bau Cua Dice](#), [Portuguese Sueca Card Game](#) score cards and [Mexican Loteria](#) cards.

Credit: Images of Loteria cards used with permission of DON CLEMENTE JUEGO DE LOTERIA: ™/© 2014 Martha Maria Sanchez Quiroz under license to Don Clemente. All Rights Reserved. The words and designs of all playing cards are registered trademarks and copyrights of Martha Maria Sanchez Quiroz and licensed to Don Clemente. All Rights Reserved.



24th Street Eastbound

The area called “Five Wounds” has one of the largest Portuguese American populations in the nation, and has a deep identity rooted in the Portuguese culture. The design incorporates lace depicting crowns and doves as well as lace doilies, all made by community members of the local Portuguese Crochet Group, meeting at the [Portuguese Organization for Social Services and Opportunities \(“POSSO”\)](#).

Credit: Images and items provided by the POSSO Portuguese Organization for Social Services and POSSO crochet group.

24th Street Westbound

The patterns at this station reference nearby San Jose High School, California's second-oldest high school: the "Big Bone Game" is the annual football game between San Jose High School and Abraham Lincoln High School, held since 1943. The trophy, in the shape of a bone, references the trophy of the first game, which was a large steer leg. Additional features of the design evoke San Jose High's mascot, the bulldog; the "Class Song" as taken from an early San Jose High School Commencement Program; names and graduation years of notable alumni; and graduation ceremonies with the tossing of the mortar board caps in the air.



Credit: Information provided by San Jose High Bulldog Foundation, Heritage Room

King Road Eastbound

Inspired by Mexican heritage told through the traditional art of [papel picado](#), windscreen patterns depict Mariachi instruments and Mexican folkloric dance. Patterns include the hummingbird (regeneration and strength), monarch butterfly (migration) and marigolds (fragility of life).

The ceiling and paving show the important trio of agricultural crops known as the "Three Sisters": beans, squash and corn set within traditional papel picado patterns. The artists created the papel picado design elements in collaboration with San Jose artist Rick Moreno.



Credit: Information provided by School of Arts and Culture at Mexican Heritage Plaza

King Road Westbound

Inspired by Mexican heritage told through the traditional art of [papel picado](#), windscreen patterns evoke Aztec and Ohlone traditions recorded in the neighborhood such as Mexican New Year and Día de los Muertos. The ceiling depicts cacti and the paving shows yucca blooms set within traditional papel picado patterns. The artists created the papel picado design elements in collaboration with San Jose artist Rick Moreno.

Ohlone Indians were among the earliest inhabitants of the Bay Area. The tribe known to be located in the vicinity to this area was the Tamien. The Tamien tribe was estimated to have had 1,200 members that spoke 7 languages at the time the Spanish began to settle in Santa Clara County. As hunters and gatherers, they lived on this land for almost 4,000 years. The Muwekma Ohlone maintain Tribal Council in San Jose, and continue to re-establish themselves as a federally recognized tribe.

Credit: Information provided by School of Arts and Culture at Mexican Heritage Plaza



Jackson Avenue Westbound

This station area is home to a number of African American churches. A unique tradition that is alive in these churches is the wearing of “church-hats”, beautiful and ornate hats that are worn especially for high religious holidays. The artists documented hats and their owners in a photo shoot at St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church. The photos were abstracted into silhouettes and applied to windscreen and ceiling. Hatboxes pattern the ground pavers.



Credit: Information provided by St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church

Jackson Avenue Eastbound

The farm labor organizing efforts of Cesar Chavez – who used to reside in the area- and other local activists inspired the designs at this station. A landscape of a 1967 letterhead of the United Farm Workers’ Movement formed the background to this design. The landscape is expanded and overlaid by a design composed from the traditional plaid of farmworkers’ garments as well as fruit and crops.

Credit: Information and letterhead image provided by the Garza Family



Alum Rock Eastbound

[Alum Rock Park](#) is located in the Foothills of San Jose in the extension of Alum Rock Avenue. Founded in 1872, it is one of California’s oldest municipal parks. From 1890 to 1932 it was a nationally known health spa with 27 mineral springs, an indoor swimming pool, tea garden, restaurant, and dance pavilion.



The Alum Rock Railroad once ran from downtown San Jose (starting at Santa Clara Street and McLaughlin Avenue) along Alum Rock Avenue and ultimately to Alum Rock Park. A round trip cost 25 cents. Starting operation in 1896 as a steam railroad, the railroad was upgraded to an electric system in 1901 and ceased operation in 1931 due to increased car ownership in the area.

The patterns at this station are inspired by vintage postcards of

Alum Rock Park, its topography, the Alum Rock Railroad, and Thenardite and Mirabilite crystals found at the park (these were originally mistaken for Alum and gave the park the name). All elements are composed in the shape of a Victorian wallpaper, as would have been typical for the turn of the century.

Credit: Vintage photos were provided by the California History Center Foundation, History San Jose, and the California Room of the San Jose Public Library.

Alum Rock Avenue Westbound

This station is inspired by the tradition of charrería, a competition similar to Rodeo. The artists found inspiration in a neighborhood store that serves this tradition, and interviewed a former Mexican bullfighter residing in the area.

Another aspect of this culture is a specific style of music: Los Tigres del Norte are one of the most famous Norteño bands and hail from this area. The music is related to polka and corridos, with the accordion and bajo sexto six-string bass guitar among its characteristic instruments.

While the pavers are imprinted with a charro's silhouette and coiled lassoes, the windscreen and ceiling evoke the patterns that decorate wide brimmed sombreros and other typical charro clothing.

Credit: Information provided by the Tenes Family



Story Road Eastbound

Inspired by the low rider custom car culture vibrant in this neighborhood, paint schemes and engraved chrome details represent the East San Jose car culture that is still an important part of this neighborhood's identity. Pavers depict an automotive engine as seen under the hood of a low-rider car while the windscreen and ceiling, the latter created by San Jose artist Raul Delgado, depict classic detailed car paint designs.

Car Culture was an important aspect of the American identity when neighborhoods in East San Jose developed in the 1940s and 1950s. From drive-in movie theaters to drive-in diners, a distinguished low rider culture emerged which included a distinct aesthetic. The first low rider club in San Jose was founded in 1974. Within five years there were more than 40 car clubs on the east side of San Jose. Story and King Roads became the epicenter of the local low rider culture.





Story Road Westbound

In 1851, Alanson Story established a 380-acre farm at a location that is now South of Story, East of King Road. This was the first farm located in this area. Story Road was thus named after this homestead. Presumably inspired by the name of this major street, the subdivision that followed about 100 years later in the area chose story book names for street names, including Bambi Lane, Cinderella Lane, and Peter Pan Avenue.

Intrigued by memories of community members in the area, the artists found several fairytale like images in various locations around the area: the storybook theme is referenced with a Quinceanera Cinderella Carriage (as recorded in front of a local store), pulled by the deer and surrounded by vines found on an old stove at the Hyuck School, the first school in Alum Rock. Although now only a memory, the sign from the neighborhood's Story-Book Market makes an appearance as well.

Credit: Images Courtesy of History San José, and Tanya Freudenberger

Ocala Avenue Eastbound

Reflecting the proximity to Reid-Hillview Airport, the designs at this station are inspired by the small propeller aircraft housed at this airport. Various propeller types are arranged to form delicate patterns reminiscent of typical craft patterns, which the artists recorded in the surrounding neighborhood.

Reid-Hillview Airport was built in 1937, currently encompasses 179 acres of land, and hosts more than 250,000 arrivals and departures every year on its two runways.



Credit: Information provided by Sharon Sweeney and Carl Honaker

Ocala Avenue Westbound

The patterns at this station reference the orchards that once covered the area – with the last remaining orchard in close proximity to the station - as well as the flower traditions important to the local Asian community. Plum, apricot and peach branches are part of Tet, the Vietnamese New Year celebration. The origami lotus flower is inspired by an encounter of the artists with a nun at the nearby Duc Vien Buddhist Community Pagoda, where she demonstrated how to fold an origami lotus flower, an important symbol in Buddhist tradition.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Merge Conceptual Design is an artist collaborative founded by Franka Diehnelt and Claudia Reisenberger in 2003. Merge mainly focuses on public art installations. Merge's design process involves deep research on local conditions, extensive community engagement and strong conceptual development. Based on specific project opportunities, the artists use many different media in their installations. The work often focuses on a sense of awareness of the urban and natural environment. See more of their work at www.mergeconceptualdesign.com.

ABOUT THE PUBLIC ART PROGRAM

The City of San José Public Art Program seeks to build community identity by initiating artworks and exhibitions that enhance the civic landscape and experience. Through active community engagement, public art strives to reflect the City's diversity, historic richness, and envision its present and future.

The Public Art Program is part of the City's Cultural Affairs, a division of the Office of Economic Development. The Public Art Program was established by a 1984 municipal ordinance that provides public art through funding from City capital improvement projects and eligible private development.

For further information and photos, please contact the San José Public Art Program.



Office of Cultural Affairs **Public Art Program**

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