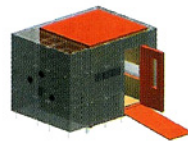


ARCHITECTURE

Chat Room



NEW YORK – New Yorkers love to talk, but will they be enticed to enter an odd-looking cube in the tumult of the city's Grand Central Terminal to reveal intimate details of their lives? That was the question facing a team of architects and designers charged with creating an interview booth for radio documentarian Dave Isay to conduct his nationwide oral history project, StoryCorps. The answer is the StoryBooth, a 12 x 9 x 9-foot “glowing

box that will recruit citizens to tell their stories,” says Eric Liftin, of MESH Architectures, who worked on the design.

StoryBooth features an illuminated exterior skin of honeycombed Panelite fiberglass (to lure the curious) over a 6,000-pound soundproof metal box (to keep their secrets safe). Inside, interviewees can retire to a homey “living room” with felt carpeting and comfortable furniture. (An earlier version with a steel mesh skin was rejected because it “looked like a cheese grater,” explains Michael Shuman of MASDESIGN, another architect on the project.) The quiet interior space is connected to the outside world by a low-slung window, where passersby can glimpse the interview in progress or hear recorded interviews at a listening station. The StoryBooth reflects a trend toward structures that are used for personal documentation or private activities, like photo booths and Internet kiosks. In addition to the Grand Central location, a second booth is planned for New York's Eldridge Street Synagogue as the project, which has its roots in the documentary work sponsored by the W.P.A., is rolled out for its two-year duration beginning this fall. Another idea, the designers say, is for a mobile version—possibly in a converted Airstream—that would tour the country collecting the stories of “ordinary lives.” www.storycorps.net

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