

# BOSTON ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

MAY 2025

## Boston Public Art Triennial

The Boston Public Art Triennial is an upcoming citywide event celebrating contemporary public art. Planned to be held every three years, it will showcase digital installations, sculptures, performance art and interactive pieces by both local, national, and international artists. The exhibition will transform parks, streets, and public buildings into creative canvases, engaging the public with thought-provoking and often site-specific works. The Triennial seeks to foster dialogue around urban space, social issues, and artistic innovation, integrating Boston's diverse neighborhoods and making Boston a key player in the global public art scene.

## Public Art & Murals

Boston's public art scene is diverse and deeply intertwined with the city's history and culture. The city is home to hundreds of murals, many of which celebrate the stories and identities of its neighborhoods. One notable piece is the Roxbury Love Story mural in Nubian Square, which pays homage to Roxbury's deep-rooted cultural legacy and contributions to Boston's Black arts and activism. The Boston Mural Map, created by the city's Department of Arts and Culture, provides an extensive guide to both historical and contemporary murals across the city. Boston's murals serve as an open-air gallery reflecting the city's evolving artistic identity, as well as the history that has made Boston what it is today.

## Neighborhoods

### *Victorian Architecture in the Back Bay*

Boston's Back Bay is one of the most well-preserved examples of 19th-century urban planning in the United States. Originally a tidal marsh, the area was filled in and developed between the 1850s and 1880s as part of a vision to expand Boston's residential neighborhoods. The Victorian brownstones that line streets such as Commonwealth Avenue, Marlborough Street, and Beacon Street represent an array of 19th-century architectural styles, including Second Empire, Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival, and Beaux-Arts. These

homes feature stone carvings, decorative ironwork, and ornate bay windows.

A key feature of Back Bay is its broad, tree-lined avenues, modeled after the grand boulevards of Paris. The grid-like street layout, designed by Arthur Gilman, was a major differentiator from Boston's traditionally winding roads and made Back Bay a model of organized urban growth. Additionally, the neighborhood incorporates a series of alleys that run behind the houses. These alleyways were originally intended for the ease of deliveries into homes and keeping the main streets clear of these deliveries. Now, these alleys allow for car parking behind homes with secondary vehicular street access. Today, the neighborhood remains one of the most expensive and architecturally renowned districts in the city.

### ***Architecture in Beacon Hill***

Beacon Hill is one of Boston's oldest and most picturesque neighborhoods, characterized by its narrow, gas-lit streets, red-brick Federal-style row houses, black shutters, and wrought-iron railings. The neighborhood is also home to the Massachusetts State House, designed by Charles Bulfinch in 1798, featuring a neoclassical facade and a distinctive gilded dome that remains one of Boston's most recognizable landmarks.

The neighborhood also features several colonial-era buildings with rare purple glass windowpanes, which acquired their distinct color over time due to the manganese content in the glass reacting with sunlight exposure. The area's timeless charm and historical significance make it one of Boston's most sought-after residential districts.

### ***Seaport and Fenway Developments***

The Seaport District has undergone a complete transformation in the last two decades, evolving from an underutilized industrial waterfront into a high-density, modern, urban hub featuring luxury condos and high-rise office buildings. The area features cutting-edge modernist architecture, including the St. Regis Residences, designed with curved glass and sleek metal panels, and Fan Pier developments, which blend commercial and residential high-rises with waterfront parks.

In contrast, Fenway is experiencing a renaissance that balances historic preservation with contemporary urban development. The Fenway Corners Project, a \$1.6 billion initiative, is reimagining the area by introducing mixed-use spaces, public parks, and enhanced pedestrian access, blending modern urban design with the neighborhood's historic sports culture. Both the Seaport District and Fenway neighborhood are areas in Boston that are experiencing rapid redevelopment.

### ***Kendall Square***

Kendall Square in Cambridge, adjacent to MIT, has become one of the world's leading innovation districts, home to a dense concentration of biotech and tech companies. The architecture of the area is a mix of converted industrial buildings, cutting-edge research labs, and modern office towers. Developments like the

MIT Kendall Square Initiative aim to integrate academic, commercial, and residential spaces, creating a thriving and welcoming urban ecosystem that encourages creativity and collaboration.

## Notable Buildings

### ***Institute for Contemporary Art***

The ICA, located in the Seaport District, is one of Boston's most striking modern buildings designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro. Completed in 2006, the building's most distinctive features are its cantilevered design and its glass and steel structure that extends dramatically over the harbor. The museum's design embraces openness, with floor-to-ceiling windows offering breathtaking views of the water. Inside, the flexible gallery spaces allow for a wide range of contemporary art exhibitions and experimental installations, making the ICA a landmark for modern architectural design in Boston.

### ***Gardner Museum & Renzo Piano Addition***

The original Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, inspired by Venetian palaces, is a masterpiece of eclectic architectural design, featuring an intimate courtyard garden with Roman, Gothic, and Renaissance elements. It is one of the most unique cultural institutions in the U.S., and it houses Isabella Stewart Gardner's personal collection in what feels like a historic European mansion.

In 2012, architect Renzo Piano added a modern expansion. This addition features a minimalist design with steel, glass, and copper facades that contrasts with the ornate historic building. The expansion houses a performance space, conservation labs, and contemporary exhibitions, while preserving the original building's distinct historical character.

### ***MIT/Frank Gehry Building***

The Ray and Maria Stata Center at MIT, designed by Frank Gehry and completed in 2004, is a bold example of deconstructivism architecture. The building's design features unconventional, seemingly unstable shapes, leaning walls, and asymmetrical towers, creating a unique and fluid form. Covered in stainless steel and brick, the Stata Center is home to MIT's computer science and artificial intelligence labs.

### ***Trinity Church***

Trinity Church, designed by Henry Hobson Richardson and completed in 1877, is considered a masterpiece of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Located in Copley Square, the church features heavy stone masonry, rounded arches, deep-set windows, and intricate frescoes. Its asymmetrical design and richly decorated interior set it apart from other churches of its time, and it remains one of the most admired buildings in Boston's architectural history.

### ***200 Clarendon Street***

Boston's tallest building, formerly known as the John Hancock Tower, was designed by a renowned architect I.M. Pei and completed in 1976. The minimalist, 60-story glass skyscraper is known for its reflective facade, which mirrors the surrounding skyline, including Trinity Church. The tower has become an iconic feature of

Boston's skyline and a model of modernist architecture in the city.

## ***Boston City Hall/ Brutalist Architecture***

Completed in 1968, Boston City Hall is one of the most polarizing examples of Brutalist architecture in the United States. Designed by Kallmann, McKinnell & Knowles, the building is constructed primarily of raw concrete with a fortress-like aesthetic and emphasizes functionality. The upper levels feature cantilevered balconies, while the lower levels open onto Government Center Plaza. Though some view City Hall as an architectural masterpiece, others see the design as uninviting.

## ***Boston Public Library (McKim and Johnson Buildings)***

The Boston Public Library's Central Branch is an example of contrasting architectural styles. The original McKim Building, completed in 1895, is a Renaissance Revival masterpiece with grand marble staircases, frescoes by John Singer Sargent, and a vaulted reading room inspired by classical European libraries. In contrast, the adjacent Johnson Building, designed by Philip Johnson and completed in 1972, embraces modernist principles with a functional, minimalist design. It was recently renovated to incorporate more light and open space, making it more inviting for visitors.

## **Shopping**

Lekker Home in the South End specializes in contemporary and Scandinavian furnishings. Machine Age in Cambridge features a curated selection of mid-century modern pieces. For fine art and home décor, the SoWa Art + Design District hosts galleries and design studios showcasing work from local artists and craftsmen.

Newbury Street has high-end galleries like Galerie d'Orsay which feature Impressionist and Modern art. As well as, Robert Klein Gallery which showcases fine art photography. In Cambridge and Somerville, spaces like Brickbottom Artists Association and Nave Gallery showcase local artists in experimental and community-driven settings.

## **Park Design**

Boston's Emerald Necklace, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, is a landmark in landscape architecture. The 7-mile chain of parks stretches from the Boston Common to Franklin Park, and includes the Jamaica Pond and the Arnold Arboretum. This urban green space preserves natural landscapes within the city, reflecting Olmsted's philosophy that parks should serve as "lungs" in urban environments. The design prioritizes natural beauty, meandering paths, and water elements, offering a balance between urban recreation and environmental conservation. The Emerald Necklace is a model for urban park design, demonstrating how landscape architecture can shape the identity of a city.

## **The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway**

The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway is a 1.5-mile-long linear park throughout Downtown Boston that encourages a sense of shared community. Opening in 2008, The Greenway is a key feature of the reinvention of modern Boston. What was once a highway was transformed into an outdoor space that encompasses gardens, plazas, tree-lined promenades, and numerous parks. Additionally, there are interactive fountains, rotating public art installations, and seasonal markets. Overall, the Greenway connects multiple neighborhoods and is a lively gathering space for both visitors and locals to enjoy food trucks, events, and community programming.

