
Quick coolness for the Dome?

The Astrodome Conservancy mulls a light show and other 'activations'

By Molly Glentzer, Houston Chronicle | February 10, 2017 | Updated: February 10, 2017 11:53pm

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Star Dome presentation.

Media: MediaOS Video

What if the Astrodome roof held the world's biggest media installation?

Think of it: The exquisite circular geometry of that five-acre pie of more than 4,000 translucent skylights could hold an ever-changing, eye-popping kaleidoscope — an attraction that would dwarf even the cool experience of the Buffalo Bayou Cistern, creating starry, starry nights that could only happen in a Houston universe.

That's the idea behind the "Star Dome," a proposal by a couple of Rice University alums who are too young to remember the Astrodome when the Astros still played there. Joshua Jest and Alex Weinheimer arrived in 2009 but were mesmerized by the geometry of the roof when they saw a view of it at night, taken from a blimp.

They shared their 3D printed model of the "Star Dome" Thursday during a presentation by the Astrodome Conservancy.

Founded last summer by Phoebe Tudor, Judy Nyquist and Minnette Boesel, the conservancy is partnering with Harris County to help make the iconic structure the new hub of NRG Park. For starters, the group has hired HR&A Advisors, a nationally-known real estate development and public policy consulting firm, to develop a business plan and suggestions for "short-term

activations" that could happen before Harris County begins its \$105 million renovation to raise the Dome's floor to street level and create a two-floor, 1,400-space parking lot underneath.

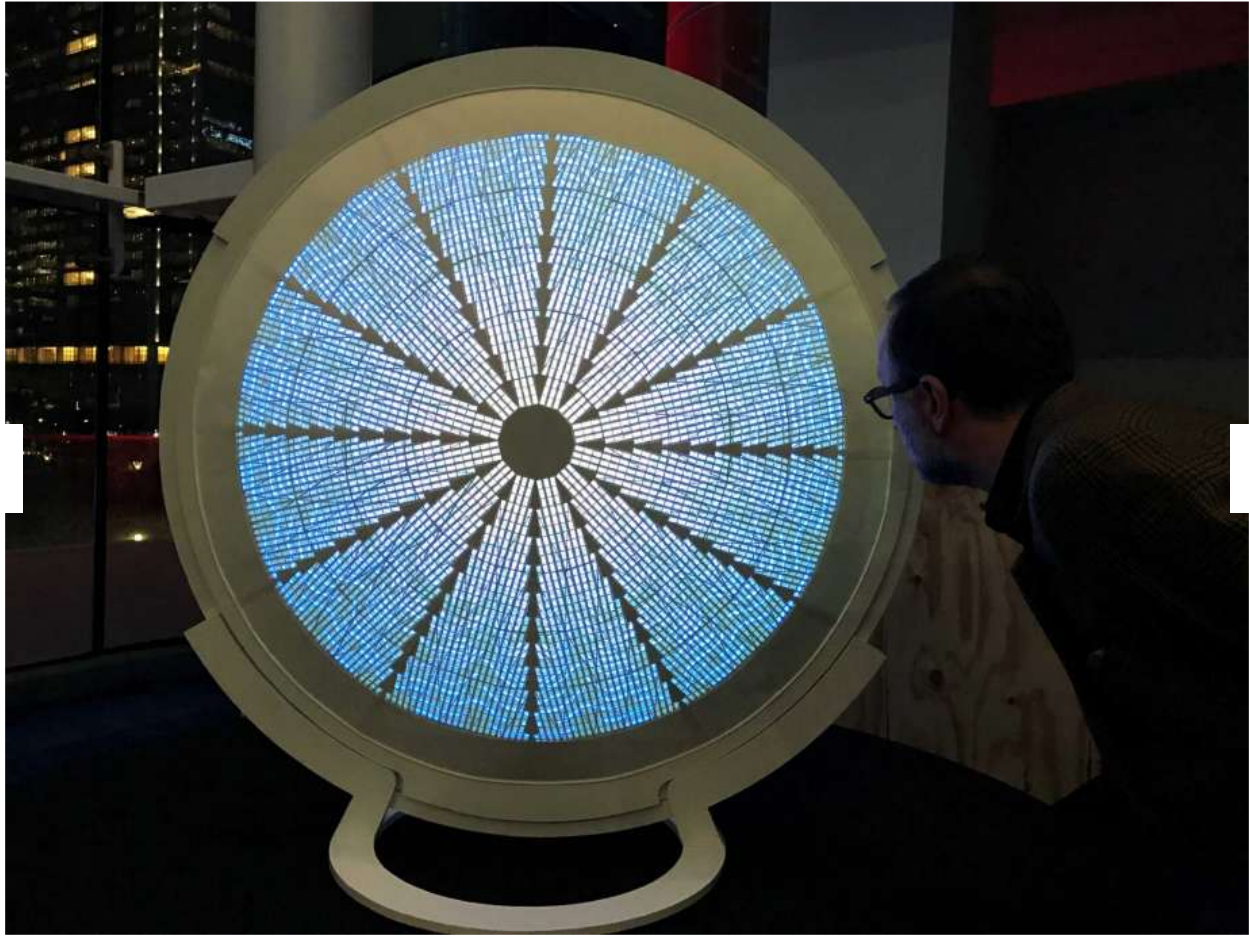


Photo: Molly Glentzer, Houston Chronicle

IMAGE 1 OF 6

During an Astrodome Conservancy presentation on Thursday, Feb. 9, 2017 at the George R. Brown Convention Center, a 3D printed model displayed the "Star Dome" concept proposed by Rice University alumni Joshua [... more](#)

HR&A partner Cary Hirschstein brought a slide show suggesting the range of possibilities for a "temporary activation strategy."

"You want to redefine the experience of the Astrodome — get Houstonians to reimagine what this place could be. Secondly, we want to inspire them, so they're really understand the potential of this place," he said. "And lastly, it's an incredible opportunity to experiment and see what resonates well in advance of the actual capital work to fit out a future civic space.... We want to make sure we're not missing an opportunity. Construction is going to start in about 12-18 months. Rather than waiting and planning, why don't we get in there today?"

Offering a look at options for consideration, not proposing specific projects, he showed slides of several spectacular, selfie-worthy, art-based "activations" in other cities -- including the "Mirror Maze" at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry, a "beach" inserted into the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C. and artist Douglas Gordon's recent "tears become... streams become," a spectacularly reflective music and water installation for New York's Park Avenue Armory.

But art-based activations could also be as affordable as Rufus Wainright's collaboration with a group of 1,500 amateur singers for Toronto's Luminato Festival, which featured an epic group performance of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" at the repurposed Hearn Generating Station.

The Dome could also immediately accommodate festivals and concerts — or even community athletic events, Hirschstein said.

The crowd buzzed; all these ideas seemed feasible.

Then Tudor handed the mic to Weinheimer and Jest, and faces lit up.

"No matter what's going on inside, you could do something with the roof with lighting to complement it," Weinheimer said. "The lit area is five acres. That would make it the

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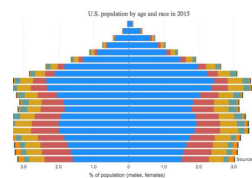
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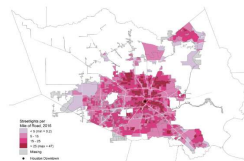
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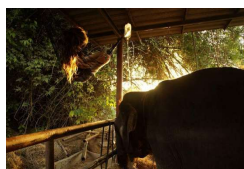
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biggest screen in the world—unprecedented, and in the spirit of the Astrodome in general." It would make the Dome, once again, unlike any other venue in the world.

The "Star Dome" might require 125 or more projectors, Jest said, "but it's not that difficult technically."

The point, he said, would be to instill something new and unique that stays true to the Dome but reinvents it. A dazzling light show could be one aspect of it. But his massive projection system could also project movies: "A giant drive-in!," he said. "Artistically, it's a wild platform for anything you could want."

Tudor said creating the "Star Dome" is on the conservancy's wish list of things to do this year, although it could cost more than \$3 million.

"One of my favorite sayings is that the only thing standing between me and my dreams is millions of dollars," she quipped.

The group campaigned to have the "Star Dome" created in time for the Super Bowl. "We thought it would be amazing, while the eyes of the world were on Houston, to have this going on next door," she said. "But I think they wanted the eyes of the world to be on football."

Star Dome project.

Media: MediaOS Video

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