

Move-in day marks new era for Goat Farm

Residential tenants and artists occupy first phase of project, but there's more to come.

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April 2, 2024

<https://www.ajc.com/things-to-do/move-in-day-marks-new-era-for-goat-farm/ER2I35QDD5BFLF2U5MVKEE53FI/>

Imagine the High Museum's blindingly white Renzo Piano campus plunked down next to a collection of weathered, 19th-century brick industrial buildings.

That contrast of the shockingly new alongside the antique defines the look of the Goat Farm Arts Center redux. Now imagine it housing 209 apartments, 51 art studios, a contemporary art museum, performance and visual arts venues and you get an idea of its new incarnation as a place to live, create and exhibit art.

The arts complex off Huff Road on Atlanta's Westside unveiled its \$250 million Phase 1 on April 1 when the first residential tenants began moving into a complex of three new apartment buildings.

But the ultimate plan, unfolding over the next two years, will bring much more to the Goat Farm's as yet unrenovated historic buildings. Future tenants include a combination bar/restaurant and a gallery operated by art book publisher Fall Line Press, as well as seven multidisciplinary visual arts and performance venues. Also on tap: the reopening of the performance and exhibition venue Goodson (formerly Goodson Yard) and the new location of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia (MOCA-GA) to a 26,000-square-foot space designed by Atlanta's Mack Scogin Merrill Elam Architects that will begin construction later this year.

The Goat Farm 2.0 is the brain child of founder Anthony Harper and New York architect Peter Zupan, who conceptualized the Goat Farm's 12-acre redevelopment mix of art and commerce, old and new. While many mixed-use developments layer on artwork as last-minute added value, art and artists are baked into the ethos at the Goat Farm thanks to Harper's commitment to keeping the arts front and center. And, in a unique arts funding model still to be ironed out, a portion of income from the property's apartment rentals (managed by TriBridge Residential) will go toward arts programming at the Goat Farm.

Credit: Handout

New residential construction stands next to the Goat Farm's 19th century buildings in one of the pleasing juxtapositions at the revamped art complex. (Courtesy of Goat Farm)

About his decision to juxtapose contemporary new construction against the Goat Farm's historic structures, Zuspan said, "I'm a firm believer that in order to really value older structures, we shouldn't mimic them or try to recreate them."

A former performance artist and opera singer, Zuspan is a partner and founder at Bureau V Architecture, which has worked with an array of cultural organizations from the San Francisco Opera to Brooklyn's Bushwick Starr theater and specializes in integrating the arts with "community, commerce, space and architecture," he said.

In drafting his plans for the arts complex, Zuspan acknowledged the site's complex layers of history beginning with its origins in 1889 as the E. Van Winkle Gin and Machine Works, a factory that manufactured cotton gins. During World War II it produced artillery for the Murray Company.

Robert Haywood, an industrial engineer came into possession of the property in 1972. He produced sheet metal, boat trailers and sold cotton gin parts there for a time. He also rented out spaces to local artists. Haywood is credited with bringing in the goats to manage the kudzu, thereby giving the place its name.

In a city that has often razed its own history in the name of progress, the Goat Farm evolution stands as an example of how to build upon the past without destroying it.

"In 1979, the Goat Farm was added to the National Register of Historic Places," said Zuspan. "At the same time you have some looking to lock in old structures as an important part of Atlanta history and you also have artists and craftspeople working towards reinventing a new future for those structures."

Integrating history into the design without simply mimicking it was paramount, said Zuspan and Harper. For instance, the white corrugated metal cladding on the residential buildings references the rural, industrial history of the original Goat Farm.

Paying tribute to the region's verdant landscape and the Southern vernacular of kudzu or English ivy overtaking buildings, several exterior walls of the apartment buildings have supports lacing up their sides that will eventually host 40-foot living walls of jasmine.

Credit: Handout

One of the new residences at the Goat Farm complex where rental income helps support arts programming. (Courtesy of Goat Farm/ TriBridge Residential)

Harper and Dave Weissman, director of development for TriBridge Residential, recently led a tour of the Goat Farm campus showcasing its sleek studio, one- and two-bedroom apartments, many with views overlooking the campus. The apartment building's hallways are painted a punchy grasshopper green, but inside the spaces are gallery-worthy black and white. Units typically range in rent from \$1,550-\$2,500 a month.

In addition, 32 apartments are designated as workforce housing and are available at a reduced rate for qualified tenants based on annual income.

Harper points out creative details during the tour like a residential clubhouse and co-working space featuring artworks by William Kennedy and Katie Stout. Rotating and permanent artworks from local artists will be an ongoing feature of the Goat Farm campus.

Outside the clubhouse is a Buckhead-worthy rooftop pool surrounded by terraced landscaping filled with succulents, shaded chaise lounges and a boss view of Atlanta's skyline.

Residential luxuries aside, Harper stresses that artists were always central to the Goat Farm and they will remain so.

"If you're sawing wood outside or if you're spray-painting outside, in a normal residential complex, you know, that might be frowned upon," he said. "Here, of course, the culture will be different."

That same flexibility extends to the creative studios, which artists can rent month-to-month and which come in an array of sizes for different needs and budgets.

To help foster community, the art creative studios are situated at the ground-floor level of the residential buildings so that creatives can easily engage in the daily life of the campus. Harper and Weissman likewise envision the pathways and streets dotted with minimalist concrete benches as gathering places where residents and artists can come together for the benefit of both.

“We wanted the occupants of these studios to see the Goat Farm campus as their collective backyard, where they could take a few steps out from their studio door and immediately and casually be part of its public space,” said Zuspan.

And that reality TV-worthy swimming pool? It’s available to studio artists, too, not just residents.

Now it’s just a matter of getting in tenants and seeing their creative energy at work.

“My worst nightmare, of course, was that it didn’t translate well and the arts ecosystem got out the pitchforks,” Harper said with a chuckle.

“We’re excited to have bodies here,” said Weissman. “That’s the best part of my job is watching people actually come and live in it and activate the space.”

FOR MORE INFO

The Goat Farm. 1200 Foster St. NW, Atlanta. 470-617-1052, thegoatfarmatl.com.

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