



Little Box Sauna is a building that builds.



The Little Box Sauna began in laying the foundations of a partnership between two young female professionals, an architect and a designer, around a shared vision of working proactively in our field, not as responders, but as activators.

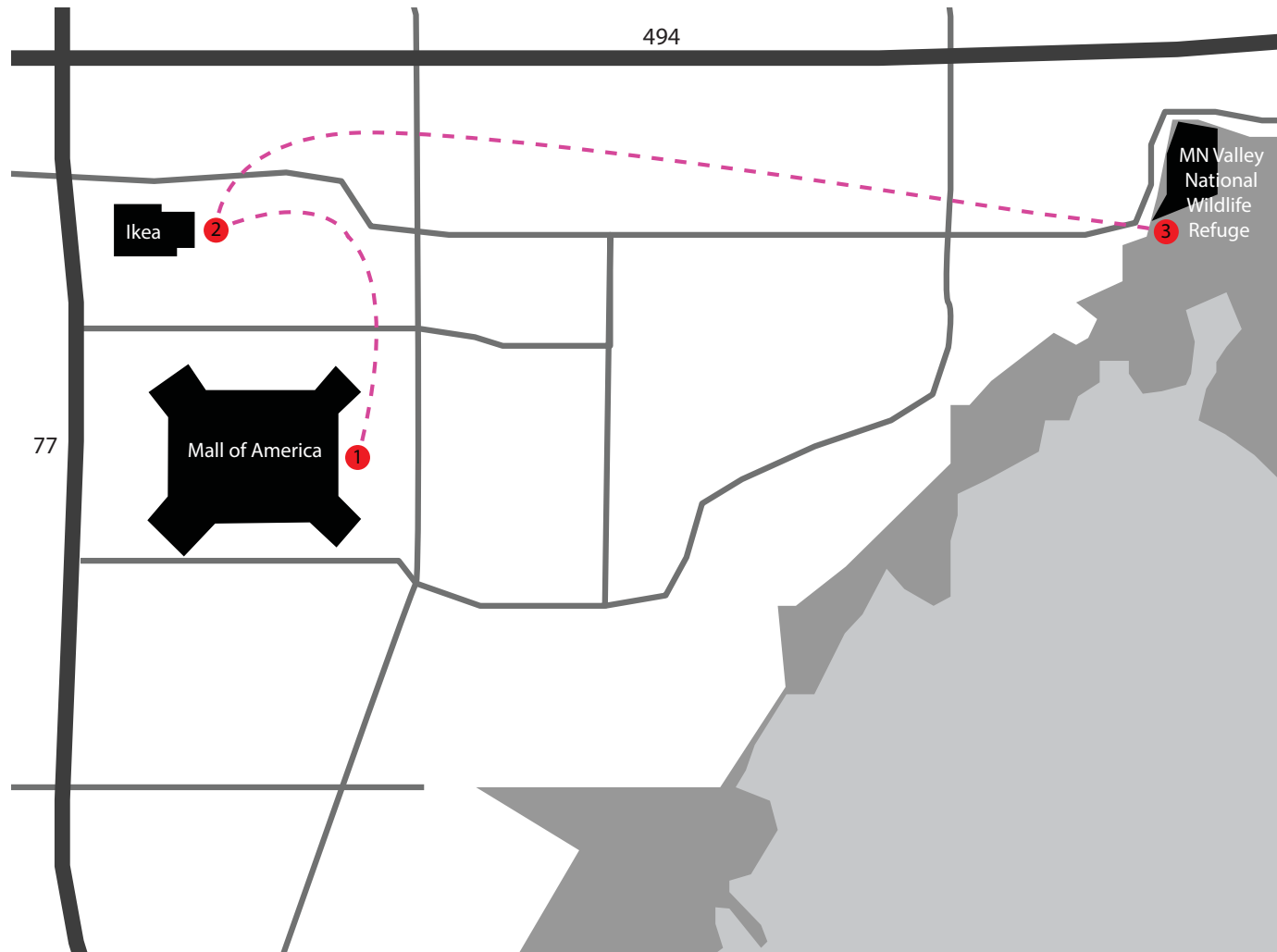


Recognizing the need in our region for a sauna that serves as a public amenity, they looked for ways to bring this project to life quickly, beautifully, and inclusively.



In response to the Bloomington call for proposals that prove design interventions “can create excitement and visibility for the South Loop and strengthen relationships” between diverse constituents, the designers crafted a winning proposal that utilized the re-emerging typology of the mobile structure to bring a sauna space directly and dynamically into public view.

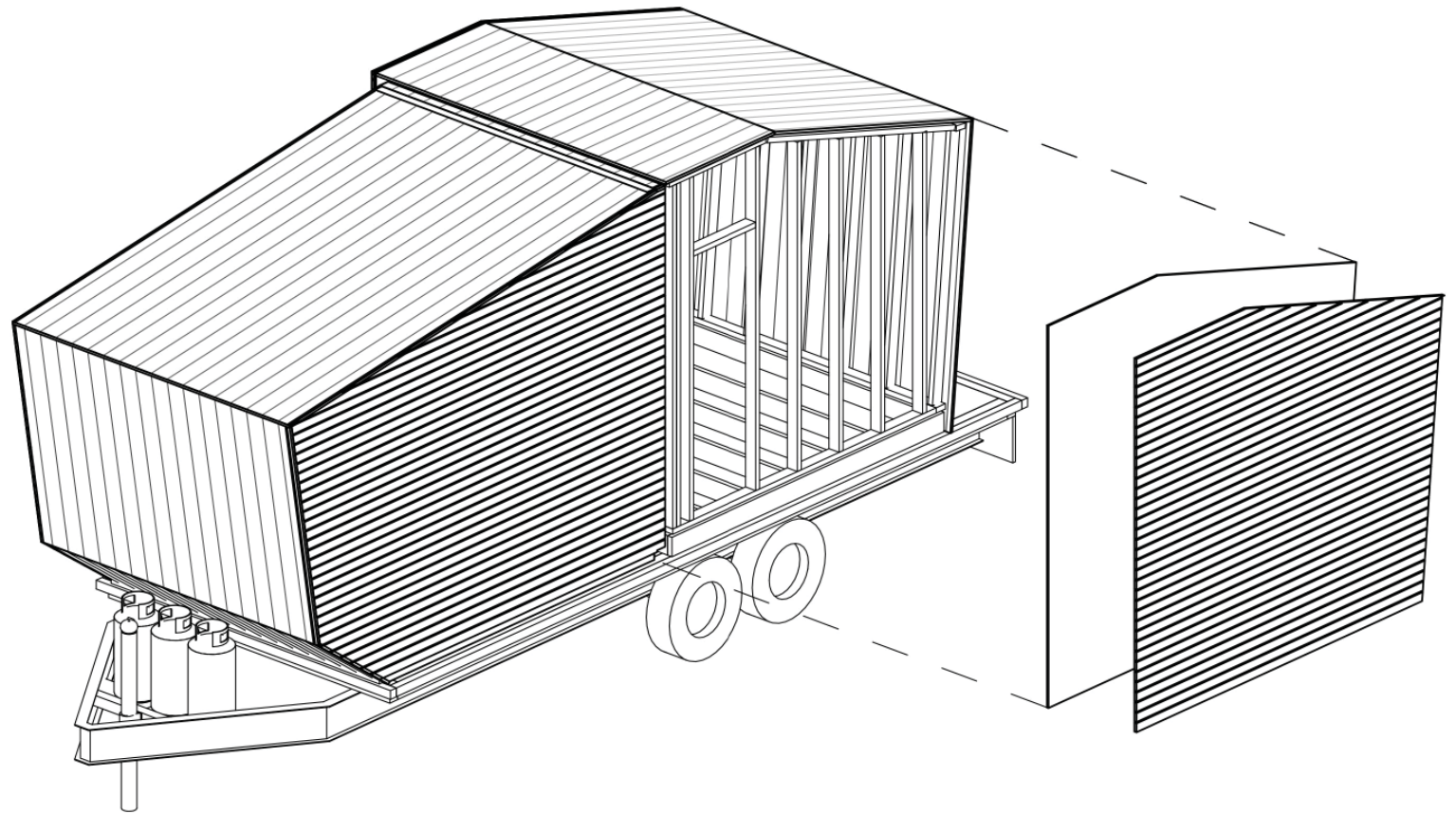
- ① Mall of America
2/20 - 2/27
- ② IKEA
2/27 - 3/4
- ③ MN Valley National
Wildlife Refuge
5/10-5/12



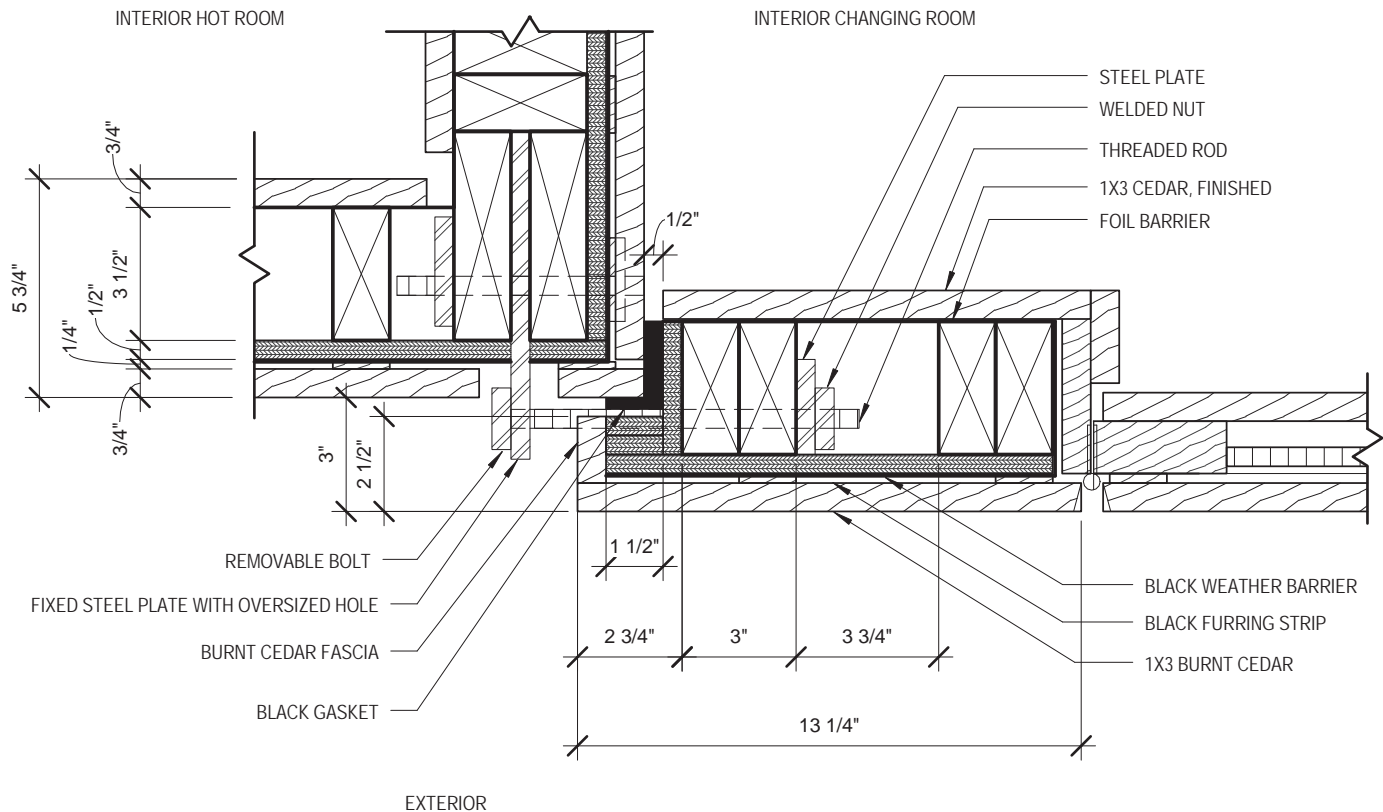
The jury was excited to see an interior space be conceived as “attention-getting” rather than hidden, and “move throughout the WHOLE area” to create an observable temporal network of nodes and connections in the city. The jury was further impressed that the designers had rallied the dedication of influential area businesses to work together to back the project and host it within the community.



The project developed from this groundwork into a flexible solution that expressed the cool changing room and hot sauna room as two shaped wooden boxes that nest into each other, or pull apart, depending on the environment.



Atypical constraints and an ambitious standard for low environmental impact spurred Little Box Sauna to support innovation in multiple ways. Responding to growing research in the sustainability of wood construction, the framing and finishes employed a range of techniques to accomplish an all-wood construction.



The framing and exterior wood system were specially engineered to withstand moving 80 miles an hour along a bumpy interstate and the forces exerted on the structure when moving the boxes on and off the trailer.



The designers developed a custom wood reveal detail for the interior to differentiate the space from common tongue-in-groove-lined saunas, yet still handle extreme changes in heat and vapor; in fact, rigorous research and testing was followed through on all interior materials to verify their stability under these extremes, and one building industry representative commented how the project was reaching "NASA-like standards."



The team ran several rounds of burning and sealing tests to develop a verified system of charring cedar for exterior cladding, based on an ancient Japanese technique called shou sugi ban, and burned hundreds of cedar boards with the help of volunteers of all ages.



Digital tools streamlined parts of the work—Revit modeling allowed for accurate material take-offs and construction sequencing, and Rhino modeling and CNC routing were employed to create a custom water bucket and ladle.



Little Box Sauna's light touch on the environment is outwardly exhibited by leaving no visible trace of its presence on the land or in the air. A propane heater sourced from California allows the sauna to utilize a high-efficiency, low-impact, low-cost fuel to work off the grid, and not generate smoke, particulates or odor.



No utilities are needed, as subtle openings bring in natural light during the day, and small battery-powered lights can be turned on at night. The true mobility of the sauna is underpinned by adhering to all vehicular regulations so it can be easily sited within the city and towed by a personal truck.



A significant factor of the success of the project was how Little Box Sauna built a collective body of support ranging from students to industry experts to civic officials to private businesses.



The dedication and ingenuity of these supporters brought the sauna through the fog of unknowns that arise with any experimental venture, such as how local codes and regulations apply to this unclassified project type, how to assure the comfort of new sauna users, and how to work together with a new set of partners towards a common goal.



More than just a building, Little Box Sauna is creating community by supporting active, healthy participation in our city, while propelling forward ideas of what architecture is and can be.

PROJECT FEEDBACK

"The Little Box Sauna is a unique experience bridging community, health, and architecture. The fact that it happens on such a micro scale and is so mobile only serves to amplify its reach and influence on the urban and social fabric of the city. LBS sauna creates a spontaneous, fun, and engaging way for people to connect with each other in the public realm."

-Peter Crandall, Urban Designer, City of Minneapolis

"The LBS was an exciting space and tool for building connections between people and businesses in the South Loop. LBS helped realize the potential of the South Loop as an urban place by weaving a human-scaled social and architectural fabric."

-Carrie Christensen, Project Manager, Creative Placemaking in the South Loop

"Participating in the Little Box Sauna project was exactly what I was looking for in a graduate school learning environment. It was a valuable experience to be involved in all facets from design, research and building. As a student I felt my design and research influence mattered and were manifested in final results. I appreciate the opportunities and trust lent to me by the designers and the school of architecture. It was rewarding and inspiring to see research efforts realized in built form."

-Tyler MacNeal, Third Year M.Arch Student, University of Minnesota

"The Little Box Sauna shows design/build education and community engagement at its best. A dedicated group of faculty, students, staff, and practitioners contributed to this traveling piece of architecture, putting design "on the road" and on the radar of many people who might not think of this as something architects would do. The environmental and human health aspects of the project also distinguish it as a traveling public-education opportunity, showing the relevance of design thinking and making to the major issues of our time. This sauna is hot!"

-Tom Fisher, Dean of College of Design, University of Minnesota

"Little Box Sauna engaged students in the School of Architecture and the broader design community to challenge disciplinary boundaries and foster innovative approaches to collaboration. The project is a shining example of the kinds of learning that occur when full-scale making and materials experimentation are foregrounded. The School is committed to this type of hands-on coursework, in part because of the success of Little Box Sauna."

-Marc Swackhamer, Head and Associate Professor, School of Architecture

"Sauna has been a part of Finnish culture, community and family life for centuries. Even when surrounded by the unfamiliar, one feels a sense of comfort, safety and openness inside its walls. The designers succeeded in bringing these elements into a community setting, creating a much needed intimate, calming environment amidst the buzz of the modern shopping center. The design is impeccably beautiful, adding to the authentic Nordic feel of the space."

-Sara Pajunen, Finnish American, Avid Sauna User



"Little Box Sauna is reintroducing a new generation to sauna, one of Minnesota's oldest and healthiest traditions."

-John Pederson, President, 612 Sauna Society

