

The Argo House

SPACE FOR CREATIVE CO-WORKING

By Lauren Argo

Feature photography by Hudson Iverson

Portrait photography by Cam McLeod

It was only once the lengthy renovation process was complete that I came to the realization the project had only just begun. The Argo House, a commercial building that was previously an abandoned rehabilitation facility now sat mint, completely restored and magnificent in its entirety. The building's white walls and fresh hardwoods made for a hollow backdrop, echoing with the slightest voice heard. We made it for ourselves, as much as for the others to come. The growth that needed to take place for it to be successful, however, would require more than a renovation; it would require the combined effort of a community.

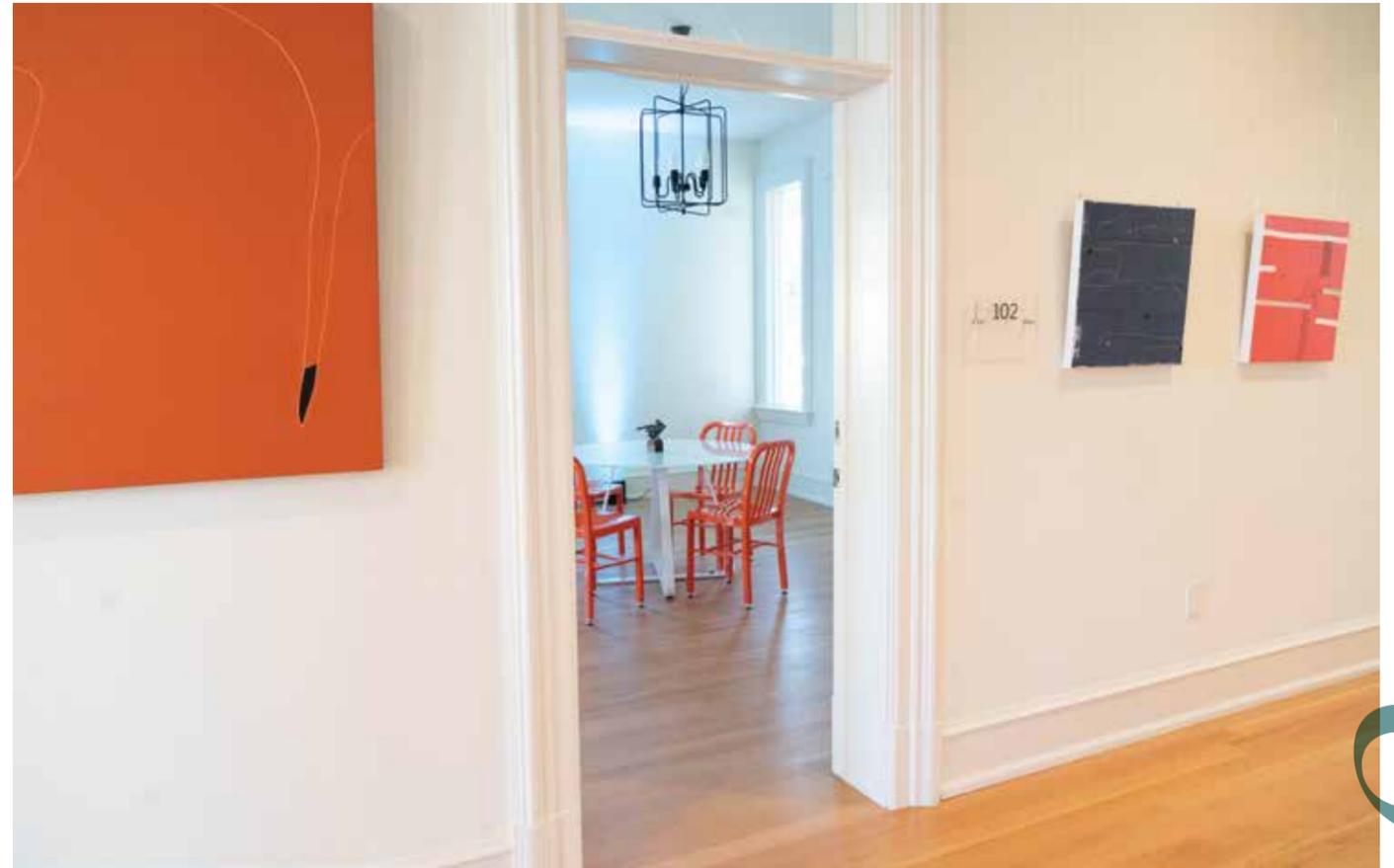
Starting my own business has always been an integral part of fulfilling my artistic and adventurous spirit. The following story is one of team and context, as I cannot tell my story without including both. My partner, James, and I met at Savannah College Art & Design in the industrial design department. Together, we moved to Atlanta to seek our futures after graduation. Not fully satisfied with our surroundings, we began to search to find a location that would be better suited for starting a new business and family. Thus, a new adventure began, all over the west,

to find the spot we might grow roots. Through research, but seemingly as if it were a manifestation, we found a place that afforded us an adventurous mountain lifestyle and a low cost of living—Ogden, Utah.

After several years of building our industrial design business, James and I participated in a great local resource, Startup Ogden. It was a new co-working space with opportunities to meet other owners and a pipeline to university-funded business grants. Winning one of the grants led to us purchasing equipment that found us looking for a permanent location to expand our business. That is when the building that would eventually become The Argo

House entered the picture. It was for sale, well under market value with an attached garage that would be the perfect size and location for our small fabrication shop. Even though the property had been looked at by many experienced developers, it sat empty and in disrepair. There was a lot of work needed to bring it up to something, which we could be proud of. We put together a team of like-minded creatives, modeled the whole building in CAD and then presented our unique concept to investors. This successfully resulted in raising enough funds necessary to do something big.

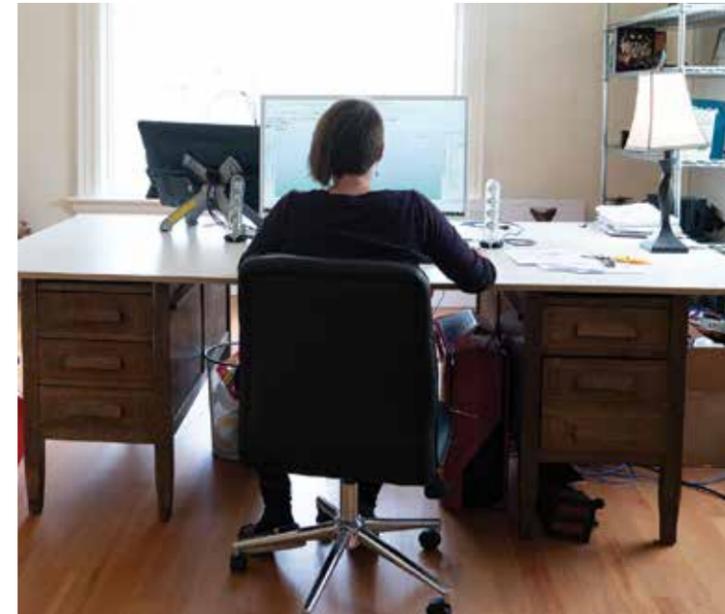




The Argo House started merely as a place for creative entrepreneurs to do work under the same roof. It was office space, but with common areas conducive for collaboration and a loosely defined emphasis on sharing ideas and resources.

There was a desire for something that could tie businesses to the community, but it was not clear precisely what mechanism we could use. At first, it seemed to make sense that we could dedicate the largest suite as a cafe or wine bar alongside the office spaces. With the large outdoor patio, it would open up a steady stream of public exposure. But ultimately, it felt limiting to have the gateway to be defined as any one thing. To be fully activated, the building needed to be many things; it needed to include flexible programming elements, as we were not yet able to predict ourselves.

The Argo House



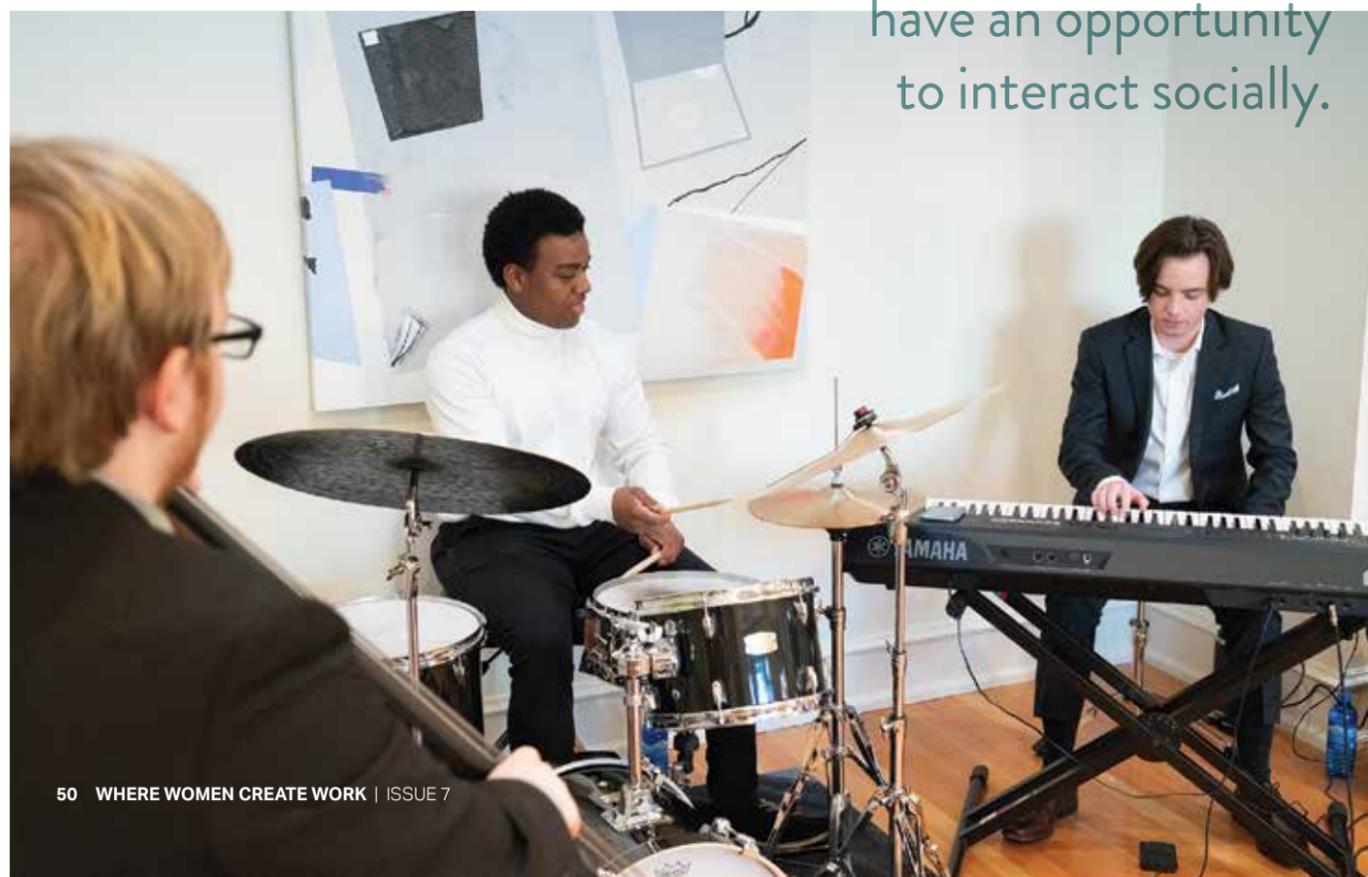
The house is ultimately a backdrop for the work that happens within.

Somewhere in between just beginning and growing into a fully mature design project, there is something magical about the interactions that happen in The Argo House. Serendipitous moments, creative brainstorming and collaborative projects are being born, and the feedback and enthusiasm from the community at large are enormously positive. We have currently 11 business that rent permanent space here, including system planners, photography, writing, marketing, industrial design, digital design and arts organizations, just to name a few. There is a creative buzz that is palpable when people are sharing projects and experiences under the same roof. Nearly a year after the renovations have been completed, it feels as if the real project has just started.





I enjoy connecting groups of people that might not usually have an opportunity to interact socially.



We had two things in place at the beginning; a few businesses to rent offices, and perfect gallery space for artists to share and sell their work. To fill in the community gap and to be a true incubator and community resource, we came up with the idea of offering memberships to the largest suite; named “Suite 5,” the best way to describe it would be flexible use space—perfect for workshops, small performances, parties and studio space. If we used the membership model for part of the building, rather than renting it to a single entity, it could do multiple things. And, it could round out the community engagement piece while it created opportunities for various organizations to grow. With a cap on the number of memberships, it would also allow the Argo House itself to have use of the space for pop-up programming and community activity events.

One of the programming elements we have taken on at The Argo House is our performance potluck nights. It is a combination of personal interaction and theme-led discussions that are predicated by intimate music, dance and poetry readings. Leaders and professional creatives from the Ogden community are invited to gather on these nights to share experiences and dream of future plans. These evenings of interaction lead to growth, and I can’t wait to see the evolution of what is to come.

To date, we’ve been able to give local non-profits and small businesses unique opportunities. Suite 5 has given the Weber Arts Council an affordable place to hold rehearsals and writing workshops for Columbia University’s playwright residency program through



The presence and mission of the house have inspired local artists to donate their time, energy and work to help improve the community



our membership program. Our business model has also allowed a Polynesian dance group a place to practice and hold classes at a fraction of the cost of a full-time studio. The remaining available schedule in the space has allowed us to donate the area to numerous other organizations to have gatherings, meetings and public forums.

The Argo House is designed to be flexible and accommodating to creative professionals as their businesses grow. The project was born of a desire for emotional fulfillment, combined with the necessity of financial viability. It is an experiment and a long process that I have to live up to. It is a chance to grow along with the others that share my vision. In the process, I'm learning that the concept of collaboration is more significant than first conceived. Even though I have the willingness to accept failure, I retain the optimistic hope that the concept will continue to grow, change and evolve into something that has multiple layers of meaning.



A user-centered design specialist, **Lauren Argo** studied industrial and interaction design at Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), with a focus on how research influences the creative process. Co-founder and Partner of Industrial Art & Design, Lauren is working to promote the vision and purpose of the **Argo House** in Ogden, Utah. Lauren has served over 12 years as a highly-skilled industrial and information systems designer. She is passionate about the artistic process, design and is always looking for meaningful interactions.

LAUREN

TheArgoHouse.co

Instagram: @TheArgoHouse, @IAD.Utah

Facebook: @TheArgoHouse, @IAD.Utah