THE NEW HUGO HOUSE
ON THE CORNER OF 11TH AVENUE & E OLIVE ON CAPITOL HILL

The new Hugo House will be one of only a handful of literary arts organizations in the country that own the brick and mortar space in which they operate. With UNESCO’s recent designation of Seattle as a City of Literature, it’s fitting that the city can boast such a space—a literary destination where people can come any night of the week to hear readers, get feedback on works-in-progress, anatomize their literary influences, and exchange ideas.

Internationally renowned firm NBBJ has worked closely with Hugo House to design a space specifically suited to the writers center.

The front salon’s expansive windows onto Cal Anderson Park take full advantage of the 18-foot ceilings.

Built-in nooks provide private places to read and write, and there will be plenty of seating for people to gather before classes or events or meet up with their book or writing group.

A platform on the south side will be used as a stage for smaller, more intimate readings.
The view toward the entry on Eleventh Avenue shows the generous seating area in the front salon and gives a peek at the bar to the right.

The bar, which will be open for events and other programs, features nods to the original house.

The counter is being built using floorboards from the old house, many of which still bear messages that attendees wrote at the pre-demolition party.

The wood trellis that hangs above the bar mimics the pitch of the original Victorian’s roof.

The theater lobby opens onto a tucked-away garden patio on the southeast side of the building.

Both the lobby and the patio, in addition to two wide corridors running east-west, allow plenty of space for people to gather and inspire visions of bigger and more ambitious programming.

Six classrooms will significantly expand creative writing course offerings, with room to offer 40 percent more adult classes and serve 60 percent more youth.

Each classroom will be freestanding and set at different angles—like little houses scattered within the House.

Frosted glass panels will double as dry-erase boards from the inside.

*Note: Furniture and finishes such as paint colors are still being finalized.*
QUICK FACTS

- 9,600 square feet
- 13- to 18-foot ceilings throughout
- 150-seat auditorium
- Garden patio
- Front salon with built-in writing nooks, seating areas, and small stage
- Six classrooms for year-round creative writing classes for adults and youth programs
- Bar open during readings and events
- Bar counter built using floorboards from the original house
- Gender-neutral bathrooms
- Fully ADA-compliant
In 1996, Linda Breneman, Andrea Lewis, and Frances McCue—three Seattle writers—began to research an idea that Linda proposed: creating an urban writer’s retreat with readings and services for readers and writers. Although Seattle was already a place known for its writers and bookstores, no central “hub” existed for writers and readers to meet and build audiences for new work.

Linda committed start-up funds to get the place off the ground and the team invited experts from the arts, business, and education to forums on the viability of a new center. They were committed to an entrepreneurial vision; they wanted to use business-like practices to build a strong institution that would remain flexible and risk-taking in its programming.

The writers center was named for Richard Hugo, a poet who attained national recognition. Hugo wrote about overlooked places and people who struggled with poverty and adversity. Hugo House made a place in Seattle for writers much as Hugo made a place in his poems for unlikely places and people.

In October 1998, Richard Hugo House officially opened to the community. Since then, Hugo House has seen thousands of writers and readers come through its doors and has become a hub for a swelling community—one that is producing some of the nation’s most dedicated writers through classes, fellowships, and events. Jonathan Lethem, Amy Bloom, Billy Collins, Sharon Olds, Jonathan Raban, Sherman Alexie, and Maria Semple are just a handful of the writers that have taught, read, and participated in panels and discussions at Hugo House. And, more recently, Charles Baxter, Kay Ryan, David Shields, Dean Young, Maggie Nelson, Karen Russell, Mary Gaitskill, Terrance Hayes, among others, have visited.

As the neighborhood around Hugo House gave way to rapid development, pressure from rising property values mounted, and the aging Victorian began to increasingly require costly repairs, the original founders and property owners decided to raze the house and build a new mixed-use development in its place. Committed to the long-term success of Hugo House and the cultural vitality of the neighborhood, they offered the organization space in the new building at significantly below market value.

In May 2016, Hugo House moved to a temporary space with the generous assistance of The Frye art museum while awaiting the completion of their brand-new facility, funded in part by the City of Seattle, King County, Washington State Building for the Arts, Amazon, 4Culture, and many other generous foundations and individual donors.
SELECTED PRESS COVERAGE

NEW HUGO HOUSE

A New Home for Hugo House
by Lora Shinn, Poets & Writers
“Located in one of Seattle's first arts districts, on Eleventh Avenue across from a busy city park, Hugo House's ten-thousand-square-foot space will appropriately serve more than ten thousand Seattle-area writers and readers annually.”

A Hopefully Great New Home (in the Same Spot) for Hugo House
by Paul Constant, The Stranger
“‘Nonprofits belong to the community so I believe that the community has to be involved in the decisions,’ [Executive Director Tree Swenson] says.”

An update on Hugo House's new home
by Mary Ann Gwinn, The Seattle Times
“The movement to secure a new home for Hugo House, Seattle’s center for writers, is about to reach some milestones.”

Hugo House Makes a Good Move—To First Hill, Temporarily
by Rich Smith, The Stranger
“...unlike the soon-to-be-bulldozed house, [the] new building will embody what Hugo House has been for the last few years: a sophisticated literary organization designed to support Seattle’s writing community.”

Half price books: Hugo House offered space in new development below market value
by Kaylee Osowski, Capitol Hill Seattle Blog
“Purchasing the property would ensure Hugo House has a space on [Capitol] Hill, a place where many arts organizations have been priced out.”

EVENTS

Hugo House Unveils an Outstanding 2015-16 Season
by Darren Davis, Seattle Met Magazine
“The center for creative writing outdoes itself with a new reading lineup featuring unmistakable voices in fiction, poetry, and essay.”

Sheila Heti’s Short Story in the New Yorker This Week Only Exists Because of Hugo House
by Christopher Frizzelle, The Stranger
“A little trivia for you literary nerds: Sheila Heti’s first-ever piece in the New Yorker, a short story called “My Life Is a Joke,” was originally written for a February event at Hugo House.”

Say Goodbye to Hugo House’s Old Capitol Hill Home with Party Where You Can Write on its Walls
by Justin Carder, Capitol Hill Seattle Blog
“Your 2016 calendar is filling up but make sure to leave a mark for the going-away party for an old friend.”

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**GENERAL**

**Hugo House Executive Director to Judge Poetry for 2016 National Book Awards**
by Capitol Hill Times staff
“Swenson, who joined Hugo House in 2012 after a decade as executive director of the Academy of American Poets in New York, joins a distinguished panel of judges.”

**Good Writing Matters: A Conversation with Tree Swenson, the Director of Seattle’s Hugo House**
by Russell C. Smith and Michael Foster, Huffington Post
“If we’re not tending the language, if we’re not learning to use it precisely, and if we’re not communicating in a way that cuts through the bullshit, we’re in trouble.”

**18 Places to Go in 2018**
by Lora Shinn, AFAR
“Take a one-day writing workshop at the stunning new home of the non-profit Hugo House writing center and see why Seattle was named a UNESCO City of Literature.”
Executive Director
TREE SWENSON | tree@hugohouse.org | (206) 456-4007

Tree Swenson came to Hugo House in early 2012, bringing a wealth of nonprofit literary arts and leadership experience. From 2002–2012, she served as the executive director of the American Academy of Poets in New York City, where she provided inspirational leadership, vision, strategy, and management of the national organization. While there, Ms. Swenson launched the Poem-a-Day program and started the annual Poetry & the Creative Mind event at Lincoln Center.

Ms. Swenson also co-founded Copper Canyon Press in Port Townsend, Washington, the nationally recognized literary press devoted to poetry, and served as its executive director and publisher for 20 years. The Press produced books from poets including Nobel Laureates and Pulitzer Prize-winners, and garnered numerous national awards.

Ms. Swenson also served as director of programs at the Massachusetts Cultural Council in Boston and is a former board president of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP). She has volunteered on countless arts grants and fellowship panels, taught classes at universities and writing centers on both coasts, and was a 2016 National Book Award judge in Poetry. She holds an MPA degree from the Kennedy School at Harvard.