

ASO Guild's Designer House 2020

Name of Project	Designer House 2020
Volunteer Association	Arkansas Symphony Orchestra Guild
Orchestra Name/Address	Arkansas Symphony Orchestra 2417 N. Tyler Street Little Rock, AR 72207
Orchestra Group Size	3
Contact Info	Larry West, Jr. 200 River Market Avenue #707 Little Rock, AR 72201 lwestjr@me.com
MSA Population	750,000

Symphony Designer House was introduced by the Symphony Guild to the Little Rock community in 1975, originally held annually before becoming biennial in 1983. This project has provided a much anticipated and established destination for decades. The event is traditionally held in spring over 3 to 4 weeks and includes a tearoom and well stocked gift shop in addition to a beautifully decorated home of distinction. **Designer House 2020**, celebrated and marketed as the Guild's 25th Designer House, was a 7500 sq. ft. manor situated on 40 acres, featuring lush landscaping, a pond and a 2400 sq. ft. guest house. Due to its status as the 25th house and the truly unique property, this house was projected to break records in attendance and revenue.

EVENT TIMELINE: The event location was secured in 2016 and most major chairs of the 2018 event continued with the 2020 house. Other chairs were put in place 6-8 months before the event and planning was ongoing from the previous house.

Fall 2019	Owners move out
January 2020	Chair takes possession of the house Bare Bones party held January 16 Designers begin work
March 2020	Designers complete work Becomes clear that house can't open as scheduled on April 10 Parties and corporate events cancelled
May 2020	House gardens opened to tours for one weekend, limited success
June 2020	House opens for tours June 18
July 2020	House closes July 19

EVENT GOALS AND ADAPTING TO COVID:

With a completely decorated venue and generous homeowners willing to remain out of their home for additional months, the decision was made to open the house, carefully following state guidelines on gathering and safety. The garden tour enabled us to gauge interest and willingness to attend an event. Garden tour tickets included a tour of the house’s interior when opened. This generated a good portion of our initial house tour attendees. We were able to create a walking path through the home that controlled distancing, and staged volunteers along the way to monitor the flow of visitors. Our marketing efforts combined with the shared experiences of those on the garden tour and those in the early days of the home tour helped get the word out that ours was a safe venue that valued our patrons’ experience. In place of large parties, this year private tours for 10 or 20 were offered with a wine happy hour. These sold out quickly and were a good source of revenue. Our last two weeks saw a constant stream of visitors through the house and almost daily private tours.

With most of our Guild members falling into the at-risk category, we scaled back our usual 500 volunteers over the course of the house tour to around 20 volunteers a day. Instead of one volunteer per room, we made do with one or two per floor. Where previous houses were filled with music from our youth orchestras and supportive musicians, this year saw only 3-4 musical interludes. ASO staff helped with online ticket sales and made sure Designer House 2020 had a presence on the ASO website. Despite having the perfect setting for it, we were unable to have a tearoom due to health restrictions.

A bright note was the gift shop. After months of staying home and not shopping, visitors were happy to have a safe boutique to browse through. Vendors who had been experiencing ever more reduced opportunities for sales events were pleased to have a great place to showcase their products. It was a win-win situation; sales were brisk.

FINANCIAL BREAKOUT OF EVENT:

Net Profit \$52,156.39

Event Income		Event Expenses	
Sponsorships/Donations	8,123.55	Bare Bones/Garden Tour	2,189.83
Ticket Sales	28,420.00	Publicity	1,322.45
Event Ticket Sales	18,395.00	Operations/Tent	15,625.59
Other Proceeds	9,453.00	Printing/Signage	2,712.20
Gift Shop/Designer Sales	<u>11,965.32</u>	Credit Card Fees	<u>2,350.41</u>
	76,356.87		24,200.48

SUMMARY:

Designer House is our largest fundraiser, often generating funds that can be used as our gift to the symphony over a two-year period. It is also the one event that involves most of our Guild volunteers and many members of the community. Looking forward we plan to continue the house flow scheme, reimagine the use of volunteers and keep the private wine tours. Although definitely not as we originally envisioned, in the end Designer House 2020 proved a success.

