

The Commoner

Bridging – Gap the

How Common House Came to Be

IT ALL STARTED WITH A GAME OF BRIDGE. And who doesn't love Bridge? Well actually it's a bit of a dying sport, but regardless that's our origin story. Our co-founder Derek Sieg was helping produce a documentary about the card game when he noticed a decline of things that knit us together: bridge clubs, neighborhood associations, bowling leagues.

As Derek said, "The institutions of belonging — country clubs, trade guilds, book clubs, whatever — have either disappeared or are dated, both in style and in substance. They're stale or exclusionary and usually both. There's a big segment of the population that doesn't want to hang out in places that feel like their grandparents' house but have a desire to belong and to expand their social circles."

And that's true — from 2003 to 2022, American adults reduced their average hours of face-to-face socializing by about 30%. Inspired to fight that trend, Derek teamed up with co-founder, Ben Pfingraff to create a common space for people to come together over food, drink and experiences. And Common House was born.

"Common House gives people an opportunity to hang out in a cool space, have great food, get work done, and get exposed to new music, ideas, and skills, while also potentially having a social experience or connection."

We opened our first House in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, followed by one in Richmond, Virginia (2020) and Chattanooga, Tennessee (2021). New Orleans marks our fourth house and our coolest project to date (just don't tell the other houses). We can't wait to show you all we have in store. ✨



AND NOW A MOMENT FOR THIS INCREDIBLE BUILDING, pictured here in 1945. According to our research, the first structure built at 420 Julia Street was a home for Alphonse Loubat, a French engineer and inventor that helped develop the first tram lines in New York City and Paris in the 1830s. The original structure was destroyed in a fire in 1884, and the existing building was rebuilt as a replica in 1887. It was used by the Port of New

Orleans for over a century as both a sugary refinery and a cotton warehouse. And subsequently became an arts supply store, and office space that was home to Sperling Advertising, a law firm and other businesses. Most recently (and notably), the space was home to the Louisiana Children's Museum. This summer, we hope to usher in a new era to 420 Julia Street, where all people are invited to gather and connect while carrying on the

legacy of community and above all, fun.

A note about design: across all locations, our goal in design is to listen to the history and the architecture of the building, and to let those elements dictate the design of its second life, in style and function. For this project, we are working with AJ Capital Partners, Hartshorne Plunkard Architecture, Joshua Joseph Interiors, and Renegade.

Member Focus

Taylor Jackson

WE RECENTLY SAT DOWN WITH OUR VERY *FIRST MEMBER*: TAYLOR JACKSON. Taylor is a born and raised New Orleanian; a true fan of her city, and the Communications Director for New Schools for New Orleans.

Taylor began her career working with some of New Orleans' great events — Jazz Fest and Essence Fest, among others. After a five year stint in city government, she landed with New Schools for New Orleans, "a nonprofit that works directly with NOLA public schools and system leaders, by sharing data, resources, and stories with our community, policymakers, and advocates as well as helping schools recruit and retain great teachers and implement high-quality curriculum."

According to Taylor, "It's a really expansive and creative time to be in New Orleans. There is definitely a creative renaissance happening. I think post COVID, we're seeing so many cool projects and businesses popping up. It feels

really exciting. We're at a very new stage for the city and growing in it together, and that's really fun and inspiring." We'll let you take it from here, Taylor.

Where are you from and what is your background?

I am from New Orleans, born and raised uptown in the Carrollton area. I will say I also split time in my teenage years in Algiers which I used to be a little bitter about, but I grew to appreciate it. I love Uptown though.

What is your favorite part about living in New Orleans now?

The community for sure, but I would say It's a really expansive and creative time to be in New Orleans. There is definitely a creative renaissance happening. I think post COVID we're seeing so many cool projects and businesses popping up. It feels really exciting. We're at a very new stage for the city and growing in it together, and that's really fun and inspiring. There is a good young-ish energy happening here. It feels like people really want to do good for the city. I think people are taking it on as a call to action, everyone is investing in the city and the city is investing back in us.

What do you do now, what is your professional background?

I am currently serving as the Director of

Communications for New Schools for New Orleans. We are a nonprofit that works in partnership with all of our Nola public schools through advocacy for grant making and other fundraising that goes through to our great educators in the city as well as the great kids that are in our schools.

I have had a really topsy turvy career path. I began working in some of our cities' great events. I worked with Jazz Fest, as well as Essence Fest among others. I had a five year stint in city government which was great. I have a love for the city and getting to work day in and day out with residents, other educators, and students is wonderful. I feel lucky to have a career so tied to the city.

How did you hear about Common House?

I have friends who are members in other cities. They spoke very highly of Common House so when the news broke in New Orleans, I felt all about it. I have always loved that building; it being the old children's museum, and I was wondering what was going to happen to the space. So when I saw the article by Nola.com I decided to apply!

What are you excited for when common house opens?



For me, it's the co-working space. A central theme of mine is to be able to be in a space with other creatives and professionals. I think that will be a really great aspect that will be useful for a lot of different projects — and of course the pool. I am really excited for that, it'll be summer and hot. I hope the wifi reaches up there, because I will be there for sure.

The Oyster Roast: Richmond's Kick-off

From the Archives: Summer 2019

ASPHALT AND HOME FURNISHINGS may seem as incongruent as mixing oil and water. And yet, last month, as we rolled out a thick straw-woven rug in the middle of the lot between Ledbury and Charm School on West Broad Street, only a few eyebrows were raised by passersby.

We were in the heart of Richmond's Art District, after all. Early morning joggers must have thought we were making a live art installation. And in some ways, we were—for what is more beautiful, more awe-inspiring than seeing people come together?

The first touch of fall was in the air and Common House's crew unloaded trucks full of equipment.

Stacks of cinder blocks were hauled off of Chef Greene's pickup to assemble, brick by brick, an L-shaped open fire stove to roast fresh Chesapeake oysters.

Table legs were popped out from their origami folds to create a shucking area where baskets stood to toss out shells.

By the time I got there, the lot already resembled a microcosm of Common House. There was an entire living room set up, complete with old-timey lanterns, potted plants, and slacks of books. The drink station was prepped with all the fixings needed for a Bloody Mary. And musicians from Spacebomb's in-house band were doing a sound check on stage: "Testing, testing, 1,2,3."

Maybe it was just steam streaming off of our make-shift grill, but there seemed to be an energy so palpable and electrifying you could taste it—and the event hadn't even started yet. A few coworkers milled around filling up ramekins with cocktail sauce as others set up iPads while smiling, laughing. There was a definite sense of "getting stuff done" but above all, people were having fun.

As I walked over to the check-in tent to help with making wristbands, I oohed and awed, for each detail that existed on an Excel spreadsheet for so long was all there before my eyes, down to boxes of cozies and rolls of tape.

When I was first emailed the production plan to help with communications, I opened it, scrolled through each tab; saw all the food, supplies, vendors, and schedule breakdowns; and immediately wanted to send a fruit basket to the Programming Director, Virginia Nelson, and the rest of the Executive Team for organizing something so seamlessly at such a large scale.

Minutes blurred into hours and suddenly, it was a quarter to two. A line formed at the front entrance where the world's coolest bouncers stood, Logan Hall and Sydney Sparks, radiating their preternatural chill. Last minute touches were made. The greenlight was given. And then, it was showtime.

I was up at check-in, along with Shelby (RVA Private Events), Taylor (Front of House), and Meg (Operations & Expansion), toggling between handing off wristbands to Members and their guests as well as giving people a low-down of who we were and what we were all about.

I didn't have to say much, really; the crowd, the oysters, the music, the vibe all spoke for itself that when I greeted some folks in, they turned to me and asked, "How do I sign up?"

Every hour on the hour, staff gave a tour of House No.2 which is only a few feet away from the lot. Digital media is a great tool but pictures on Instagram can only go so far in capturing the action and the magic of the space. And people were eager to see it as much as we were eager to show all the progress that is being made.

When you enter, large wooden planks line the ground level, which will be crucial in reinforcing the foundations. Once that step is finalized, then the construction crew will raise the roof—and we will be raising it soon—in order to install a pool for next summer.

Also, on the ground level are piles of tin from the original ceilings. While tagging along on one of the tours, I was amazed by the amount of people who asked about historic preservation and wanted to know more about the building's backstory.

A few weeks prior, I did some sleuthing and learned that 305 West Broad Street was once a furniture factory and store. At the beginning of the 20th Century, home furnishing was one of the city's most important trades where attention to quality and craftsmanship put Richmond on the map against rivaling factories in New York and Chicago.

MAYBE IT WAS JUST STEAM STREAMING OFF OF OUR MAKE-SHIFT GRILL, BUT THERE SEEMED TO BE AN ENERGY SO PALPABLE AND ELECTRIFYING YOU COULD TASTE IT..

After a fire gutted the fifth floor in the 1950s, and after a changing tide in industry trends, the building, once restored, served as a mixed-use structure: apartments on the uppermost levels and the home office to a marketing firm on the ground floor.

Fast forward to the present day, and as we move into the space that same core spirit of craftsmanship will be maintained from the inside out.

In the courtyard, on the exterior wall, there will be a hand-painted mural by husband-wife team, Thicket Design, with a cool, postmodern aesthetic. Union Hall, the main event space, will feature preserved tin on its 20-foot ceilings as well as have hand-crafted tables for sit-down dinners that add to the room's rustic charm.

When looking at the renderings, it is clear that throughout the House's six stories, the architects and designers have put thoughtful attention to balancing historic elements with uniquely Richmond touches in order to really capture the city's eclectic and dynamic personality.

On the tour, people's eyes widened with curiosity and wonder as they entered onto each floor. The building's inherent beauty coupled with the renderings and words "double-sided fireplace" made one gentleman standing next to me whisper to himself, "Annnnd I just found my new office space."

Down below, the roast hummed on. When the tour group got back down, the scene was teeming with so much energy, excitement, and life that for a split second I forgot where I was until I saw familiar faces of Members from Charlottesville chatting with new Members in Richmond.

I saw friends who were trying to teach each other the proper way of cracking open an oyster. Later, I'd learn it's all about finding the hinge of the shell and digging in with the right amount of gusto. Later, I'd also learn I'm terrible at opening shells.

Kids ran around while others little ones dangled their legs off of Bronco, Common House's newest adobe-colored jeep, that functioned as part-parked-car, part-playground.

Music poured off of the stage, drinks flowed, and new friendships were made.

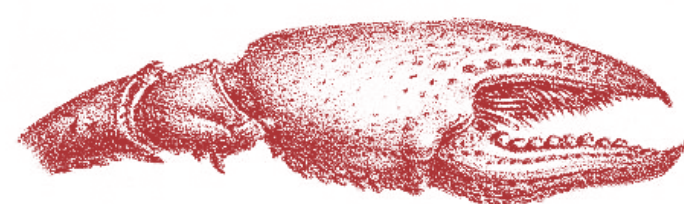
Everywhere you looked, there was a sweeping sense of community, togetherness; the kind of feeling that sinks into the hollow of your chest and reminds you of the simple joys of being alive.



Over 450 Richmonders filled the alley next to what is now Common House Richmond.



Matt Greene, our then CDC, tossin' oysters on the fire.



Crawfish: How to Eat 'Em

1. HOLD THE TAIL END IN ONE HAND, THE HEAD IN YOUR OTHER.
2. TWIST GENTLY WHILE PULLING APART, LIKE YOU'RE TAKING A PEN CAP OFF.
3. GIVE THE HEAD A GOOD SQUEEZE WHILE YOU SLURP UP THE JUICES. THE REAL FLAVOR-BOMB.
4. WITH YOUR THUMBS, CRACK THE TAIL SECTION DOWN THE MIDDLE, LIKE OPENING A FORTUNE COOKIE.
5. PINCH THE TAIL END AND PULL THE MEAT OUT.
6. NOW DO THAT AGAIN 'TIL YOUR HEART AND BELLY ARE FULL TO THE BRIM.

People that would love to meet you

ANGELA KWON DIRECTOR OF EVENTS, NOLA
 RAQUEL ROMAN MEMBERSHIP MANAGER, NOLA
 JORDAN MCCONNEL DIRECTOR OF BRAND & COMMS

MEG DOUGHERTY CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
 ASHLEY SARRIS PROGRAMMING MANAGER, NOLA
 AUSTIN BAILEY DIRECTOR OF MEMBERSHIP

VIRGINIA NELSON DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING
 JOSHUA CHARLES INTERIOR DESIGNER
 BEN PFINSGRAFF OWNER / CO-FOUNDER

KEITH FREEMAN CREATIVE DIRECTOR
 GRAYSON GAVRAS BRAND CONTENT MANAGER, NOLA
 TAYLOR MOODY DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR