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"Cool Thinking"

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# Cool Thinking

We can't change the climate, but we can change our attitude — and, with a few good ideas, we can make winter in Boston less difficult, maybe even pleasurable. *ArchitectureBoston* asked readers how they would improve winter in the city.



## Urban Hookah >

Moskow Architects

We recently considered the plight of folks who smoke in the winter. Smokers are really the current pariahs of society — you have undoubtedly seen them huddled in doorways shivering and puffing. Our Urban Hookah addresses their needs (and the needs of those who do not like to enter a building through a cloud of smoke), providing warmth and shelter.



## Bridges to Warmth

David Roberts PE

Even the hardiest of Bostonians cringes at the thought of crossing one of our many bridges (Northern Avenue, Congress, Summer Street, or any of the bridges crossing the Charles River) in the months of December through March, when the bitter winds can penetrate all that L.L. Bean has to offer.

The solution? Install 10-to-15-foot-high Plexiglas (we still want to keep the view) wind barriers on each side of the bridge with overhead gas-fired radiant heaters. These provide both a brief respite from the cold (radiant heat warms the objects, not air) as well as sidewalk snowmelting. The cost of the project would be small enough to be easily buried deep within a Big Dig change-order (who'd know?!).

## < Light Rooms

designLAB architects

We propose the distribution of “light rooms” throughout Boston to provide communal respite from the darkness of winter. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a condition that affects over 10 million Americans, with the highest incidence in northern latitudes. Researchers believe that therapy using bright light can lift depression or reset a sleep cycle.

The light rooms would be constructed of translucent polycarbonate panels enclosing simple benches for up to 12 people. A full-spectrum 10,000-lux light source will bounce light off one opaque wall, simultaneously flooding the interior with light and creating a glowing neighborhood beacon. Funding for the construction of the light rooms would be provided by corporate sponsors and credited on the luminous surface of each light room.

## Hygge

Adam Jacobi

A word that exists in Denmark (and most likely all of Scandinavia) is *hygge*. *Hygge* is loosely defined as comfort/coziness/warmth. It is a way to live and cope with long dark nights and never-ending snow. It's not an object or event — it's an attitude. The website [Linkdenmark.com](http://Linkdenmark.com) offers a definition: “It doesn't translate directly into any other language but we can illustrate it in action: Gather the family and invite over your closest friends. Push the sofas and chairs up close to the coffee table. Turn off the lights and light some candles. Better still, light a fire in the hearth, serve plenty of good food and drink, raise your glass and make a toast or two, or three, and feel the warmth flow around the table. Smile at each other until you see the candlelight shimmering in each other's eyes. You've got *hygge*!”

Whatever it is, Boston could use some.

## Hot Arcs

Pamela de Oliveira-Smith

Imagine arching heating elements installed along the downtown sidewalks — including the Public Garden and the Common. Think of them as open tunnels that glow white (or, a nod to Christo, saffron) but are not a solid structure. Viewed together, they would look more like a Slinky. The effect would be warming and glowing. The rods would be about 7.5 feet tall and just wide enough to line the walks.

On one special day, let any child dance in *The Nutcracker*.

— Diane Georgopoulos FAIA

## A Winter Cornucopia

Diane Georgopoulos FAIA

- I'd suggest some kind of competition for the holiday tree-lighting on the Common instead of the limp strings of bulbs that get hung every year. The shops on Newbury Street (Armani, DKNY, Brooks Brothers) could each sponsor a tree to be designed by one of their store or window-display designers. On First Night, Bostonians could vote for their favorite tree.
- Taking a page out of Providence's WaterFire evenings, imagine a Fire-and-Ice walk along the Rose Kennedy Greenway, where large-scale ice sculptures interspersed with braziers would illuminate a romantic walk. Have stops along the way where small choirs could sing — Boston has an unbelievably large number of choruses. Hot chocolate, hot cider, and fleece earmuffs could be sold by vendors under heaters.
- On one special day, let any child dance in *The Nutcracker*.
- Like the Asian festivals where lanterns are floated to commemorate the dead, establish a date when Bostonians can buy little biodegradable lanterns or candles to set in the water at Long Wharf and watch as they float out to sea taking our troubles away.

## Pedestrian Corridors

Mark Lewis, Assoc. AIA

When I worked downtown, I used to always try to find a way to get from one place to another by spending as little time outdoors as possible on those bitter cold days. That meant traversing building lobbies, atriums, arcades, overhangs, and subway connection corridors (Downtown Crossing from Park Street, for example).

I always thought it would be great to have a route that people could travel in the winter that could keep them sheltered. Let's have a series of sheltered outdoor pedestrian corridors that could move people through the city. A great opportunity now exists to do such a thing on the Greenway.

## True Grit

Tim Love AIA

Winter in Boston would be just fine if the amount of sand built up as a result of salting and sanding the streets could be addressed. As a South Boston resident, I can report that Southie is "serviced" disproportionately by the salting trucks (thanks to all of the politicians and city workers who live in the neighborhood). The crux of the problem is that there is so much sand in the mix that the grit has climbed seven feet up the side of my rowhouse by March. In addition, there is constant dust in the air and grit on the floors. This condition has a much bigger impact on my mood than snow, wind, or cold weather. Northern European cities such as Berlin, Copenhagen, and Munich have no sand-grit in the winter months (presumably due to the application of environmentally friendly chemicals). The City of Boston recently hired a new director of public works from Denver. Is this our chance for snow-removal reform? I am hopeful, since, while I have never been to Denver, I imagine that it (as a shining new Western city) has impeccable Munich-quality snow-removal techniques. If sand can be eliminated, the entire culture of this city will change: a Copenhagen/Munich-like blossoming of winter culture. (Unfortunately, Berlin, where the sun is hidden behind a wool blanket of clouds for the entire winter, is just too depressing — even with its clean streets.)

## Snow Shine

R. Vickie Alani

I would love to see flush in-sidewalk uplighting — especially in the no-shovel zones. In the fall, summer, and spring, we would get lots of glow, but in the winter, the piles of snow would shine! The bigger the pile, the more awesome the sight. We would dread the shovelers digging out the bright landscape. A certain turn of emotions.

## Boston's Diamond Necklace

Raymond Gonzalez

The best way to experience a winter day is from a warm interior. Boston's Diamond Necklace would be a series of steel-and-glass winter gardens connected by existing concourses, new public thoroughfares, and the T system. Each structure could serve as a gathering place and work as part of a system of interior spaces to make getting around the city in winter easier. (And when the weather permits, the structures would be open to the elements.)

## Hearths >

Jim Sandell AIA

My family's antidote to cold New England winters is a warm fire. When we recently renovated our home, we included a cooking fireplace built at counter height next to the stove at the heart of the kitchen. Banquette seating for dining and gathering, an island for food prep, and an Umbrian hood impart an Italian style that recalls our many years of living in Italy.

The pungent smell of wood smoke, hot embers cooking sausages, or a roast slowly cooking on a built-in rotisserie makes meals a special time for the family. Starting each day with a fire that continues to warm the hearth throughout the day helps keep winter at bay.



A fire that continues to warm the hearth throughout the day helps keep winter at bay. — *Jim Sandell AIA*

## Sing!

Kathy Gips

Let's have regular winter sing-alongs on City Hall Plaza the first Thursday of every month — rain, snow, or shine.

PHOTO: JIM SANDELL

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## < Ice Lanterns

Peter Vanderwarker

### Ice lantern specs:

1. Fill balloons with water (16" diameter, round, party balloons, available at iParty).
2. Place each balloon on a plastic plate, for support. (I recommend Heller, designed by Massimo Vignelli.)
3. Keep the plate dry, so the lantern does not freeze to it.
4. Freeze at 25 degrees or lower for about 18 hours. Keep away from sun.
5. If you hang the balloon from above, you will get a taller lantern.

### Next day:

6. Cut balloon and remove with some hot water.
7. Punch bottom of lantern with a knife to let water out.
8. Place a lit votive candle inside.
9. If you need to make a chimney, use drops of boiling water.
10. Call your friends over. Serve them chilled beer.
11. Fill balloons with water (16" diameter, round, party balloons, available at iParty).
12. Repeat.

PHOTO: PETER VANDERWARKER



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