

# HARDING

SUMMER 2021

**QUALITATIVE  
RESEARCHER  
*OF* IDENTITY**



# NO ROOTS, NO LIMITS

*Utilizing ingenuity and talent, Caleb Brackney creates the Roamer Bus*



the Roamer

By MEGAN STROUD  
Photography by ALEXIS HENDERSON  
Logo by CALEB BRACKNEY

**INSPIRED BY WHAT HE LEARNED IN THE INTERIOR DESIGN PROGRAM AT HARDING, Caleb Brackney ('18) converted a school bus into his own tiny home for only \$10,000, utilizing space planning and repurposing unusual materials to create a viral result.**

Brackney came to Harding to study interior design as preparation for the dual master's degrees he is currently pursuing at the University of Tennessee — a Master of Architecture and a Master of Landscape Architecture.

"Harding grounded me, taught me fundamental skills and ideas, and introduced me to a lot of concepts that graduate school did not," Brackney said. "I learned a lot about how space affects lifestyle and how materials and textures influence the way you experience life. They sound simple, but studying them really opens the world up to understanding how all those things come into play to form your experience. Landscape architecture deals with textures and patterns in nature while interior design is on the inside. Those honestly go together more for me than architecture and interior design because architecture is about projects where interior design and landscapes are about people."

Brackney decided to be a landscape architect when he was 12 years old while riding in his music teacher's Jeep full of plants. Raised in a family with seven children, playing music together — whether it be a fiddle, mandolin, bass, banjo or guitar — was their way of bonding and spending time together. In the same way that music is woven into Brackney's decision to become a landscape architect, music also is woven into the space he created for himself in the "Roamer Bus."

When Brackney decided to go for it, he shopped on Facebook Marketplace for about a month before purchasing a 36-foot, 1995 Thomas International school bus for \$3,000. With only \$7,000 left in his budget for a project that typically takes nearly \$50,000 to complete, Brackney focused on repurposing materials, learning things like plumbing, carpentry and sewage on the go, and personalizing the 220 square feet of space to his own lifestyle using space planning.

"Space planning, for me, is about using spaces for as many different purposes as you can," Brackney said. "It's understand-

ing how spaces are used and organizing them in a way to maximize their potential."

Brackney's kitchen, which is home to the mini fridge from his college dorm, utilizes the driver's space for additional storage. His unique skylight allows him to stand up tall in front of his kitchen and closet. His living and bedroom are combined to allow more guests to sit comfortably in front of his swivel television. His bathroom, hidden in the back of the bus behind his headboard, allows the large door in the back of the bus to remain functional for loading and unloading larger items. Other features include a 7-foot closet, queen bed, couch that converts into a second bed, headboard with magnetic cabinet doors, and hammock hooks.

"There is no wrong or right way to do it," Brackney said. "I think that's why it's so critical to understand your client or yourself when you are doing a project like this."

One of Brackney's favorite aspects of the bus is utilizing optical illusion. The shiplap in the front of the bus is actually wider than the shiplap in the back so that when you are in the front of the bus looking backward, it makes it look longer and wider. He created the same effect with the shelves on the



sides, which taper in and become smaller as you move from the kitchen to the bedroom. Brackney used intentional design to make the most out of a small, 7.5-foot-wide space.

"In my head I had this vision for basically what it turned out to be, but I honestly didn't think it would get so viral," Brackney said.

Since its completion, the "Roamer Bus" has gained 2.5M views on TikTok and 52,000 followers on Instagram alone. Because he was getting daily inquiries about different aspects of his project, he created a website and Etsy store where people could use his plans and ideas as resources for their own projects.

Brackney lives in the bus full time with his golden doodle Ivy and plans to take it to Berkeley, California, this summer for a highly



competitive internship with Peter Walker Landscape Architects, known for projects all over the world such as the 9/11 Memorial, Marina Bay Sands Resort and Jewel Changi Airport.

“Walker is arguably the most famous landscape architect alive,” Brackney said. “One intern is from India, one is from Harvard and one is me, and the reason I got it is because of the bus. They loved the idea of using what knowledge I have learned in school and figuring out how to do something like this. The bus was my way of getting in. I am no different from anyone else at Harding. My dad is a minister, I am the oldest of seven kids, and I was homeschooled. I think it shows that if you work really hard, you can be bold.”

Brackney began this conversion project as a personal case study to apply what he had learned in school and, at the end, gained a full-time home, confidence in his ability and a chance to show off his work to the world. With the “Roamer Bus,” he has no roots and no limits, and he encourages others to do the same by finding their passion and sharing it with the world.

### ARCHITECTURE COMING FALL 2022

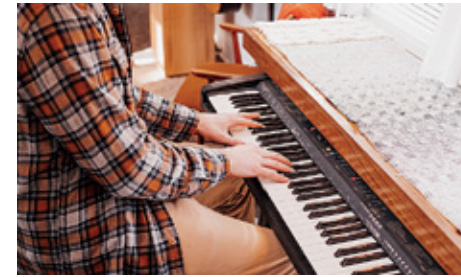
The 168-hour accelerated program, built on a cohort model, will result in the completion of a Bachelor of Arts in architectural studies and a Master of Architecture in five years. Upon completion of the M.Arch., students will be eligible to sit for the licensure exam. Taught from a Christian perspective and with an emphasis on a liberal arts foundation, the curriculum will support and encourage interactive learning during lectures and studios. Additionally, there are plans to include an internship experience and an international program component to the degree, exposing students to a diverse set of architectural examples around the world. Learn more at [harding.edu/architecture](http://harding.edu/architecture).

“Focus on what is interesting to you in your field. You chose interior design for a reason — or business students choose business for a reason, or PT students choose that for a reason. Focus on what excites you about your passion. Your passion is not necessarily just your major. There are so many different aspects of it. If you focus on what inspires you, figure out a way to show that to the world. When you have an idea that you are really passionate about, start acting. I am so thankful I acted and accomplished this dream. If you are passionate about something, don’t let other people hold you back from what you want to do, but build off their excitement as it progresses. At the end of this conversion, so many people were excited about it, and it kept me inspired. I led the charge for inspiration and then relied on other people the rest of the way.”

Learn more about Caleb Brackney and the Roamer Bus by following him on Instagram and TikTok (@RoamerBus), exploring his website ([roameroutpost.com](http://roameroutpost.com)), and watching this Tiny Home Tour at [magazine.harding.edu](http://magazine.harding.edu).

## THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Caleb Brackney made a small space a functional home in which he can thrive. Learn more about some of his favorite innovative ideas utilizing space planning and repurposed items on a budget.



### SLIDE-OUT KEYBOARD

If music is what makes your space feel like home, utilize space to hide it away when it’s not being used. A slide-out keyboard from the main eating and studying space offers a perfect opportunity to hide a piano. “Music is special to me, so I intertwined it with my bus because it’s my life and home,” Brackney said. “I’m not the most accomplished musician, but I enjoy playing with other people and building memories around a campfire with a guitar.” Brackney also was a member of Belles & Beaux while he was a student at Harding.



### TRAILER ROOF DECK

Even with a small interior space, the bus serves as a camping destination for many of his friends, so Brackney created an outdoor space on the top of the bus. After taking the axle off an old trailer, he attached it to the two rails on the roof, preventing leaking that would have occurred from bolting into the sheet metal.



### BUTCHER BLOCK COUNTERS

Countertops are essential but costly. Brackney found these old semi-truck beds made of oak on Facebook Marketplace for only \$40. Knowing it would be durable, he bought them and repurposed them into his butcher block kitchen countertops by planing, sanding and staining them.

### MULTIPURPOSE MASON JAR LIGHTS

In search of extra light and storage, Brackney used a set of mason jars, half of which serve as storage containers while the other half serve as drinking cups and clear shades on light bulbs. He is an advocate of glass storage, and attaching the tops of mason jars into the shelf makes it a rattle-proof and shatter-proof option on the road. “I had seen the idea about mason jars hanging, but dropping the lights in was one of my little brother’s ideas,” Brackney said. “I needed some light on my desk area, but I didn’t want lamps sitting on the counters. It’s so iconic. I’ve never seen anyone do this before, and it ties in with the lights in the back, which was actually a repurposed light fixture from the Branding Project during my junior year at Harding.”

### CLERESTORY SKYLIGHT

If you are too tall to stand up straight inside a bus, like Brackney, find a way to create more head-room. Acrylic strips let light stream in and fill the center of the bus while adding extra headspace. “I have never seen anyone do skylights like this,” Brackney said. “I got the idea from researching sailboats, which have closed, rounded interiors. Some sailboats have a little bit of a skylight above, so I just cut a hole in the ceiling, hoped the bus didn’t fall apart and made it work. It makes a big difference.”



# HARDING

SPRING 2020



**#STAYS SAFE**



**#STAY HOME**





# HARDING

WINTER 2020



**BERLIN WALL**  
The "Wall" (officially divided the German Democratic Republic of Berlin from West Berlin in November 1961. For nearly 40 years, the wall established a physical barrier that separated the western and eastern halves of the city and symbolized the ideological divide of the Cold War. The wall's construction consisted of a concrete wall nearly 130 miles long. Murals and graffiti adorned the East Berlin side of the wall, but only the wall's border along the Berlin Wall Memorial and "Checkpoint Charlie" was marked with graffiti and cultural graffiti. The remains of the wall preserved in the Berlin Wall Memorial (1990) at "Heister-Platz" are the last of the Berlin Wall.

The Berlin Wall segment is owned by:  
Ripley Entertainment, Melbourne, Florida

The artwork is sponsored by:  
The Clifton L. Gartin Jr. Endowment for  
History and Political Science  
Florida University  
Dr. Anne-Marie, Ohio

BRINGING  
HISTORY  
TO LIFE

With the help of interior architecture and design students, the building that housed Searcy Children's Home is now renovated to meet the needs of Sparrow's Promise including a family visit center, a safe haven, and an administrative wing with common areas and training space.



sparrow's  
promise

[www.sparrowspromise.org](http://www.sparrowspromise.org)



PROVIDING HOPE  
FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

# A NEW PROMISE

By MEGAN STROUD  
Photography by JEFF MONTGOMERY

**T**HE RED DOOR ON THE HOUSE ON MOORE AVENUE IN SEARCY OPENS to a spacious, naturally-lit room with tall ceilings. Looking past the desks at the front, a large dining table and living room welcomes parents and children, no matter what their backgrounds may be. The house was previously Searcy Children's Home, but, with the help of interior architecture and design students from the University, it is now a renovated space with a new purpose.

The trend of moving away from group homes and toward foster care left the former Searcy Children's Home searching for a new way to stay involved with families in the community. After several years of planning, brainstorming and offering transitional services including a day care, the board of directors, led by chairman Andrew Baker ('98), approved a new concept — Sparrow's Promise.

"We were trying to come up with something that captured our mission, but we needed to get away from the children's home image because we don't have kids that live here anymore," executive director Brandon Tittle ('04) says. "The idea for the name came from Matthew 10 where Jesus talks about the sparrows. He says they won't fall to the ground outside of the Father's care. That promise spoke to us because that is exactly what we are trying to do. We are trying to come alongside people who are going through a hard time and say, 'We care about you, we are going to help you, we are going to fight for you, we are going to support you, and we want to specifically help you get your kids back and get your family back together.' Through that we are able to share the promise that we love you, but even bigger than that, God loves you."

Just changing the name, they realized, was not adequate. The original footprint of the structure did not support the new vision. Baker discussed the project with assistant professor of art Amy Cox ('98), and a specific request from the Department of Human Services revealed the need for a family visit center. With the help of Cox, interior architecture and design students at Harding, Mike Steelman at SCM Architects, and Patrick Connell at Connell Construction, the building is now suited to meet three diverse needs with three wings: the family visit center, a safe haven and an administrative wing.

#### THE BEVERLY FORD FAMILY VISIT CENTER

While the new purpose for the building was still being determined, DHS specifically requested a space where foster children and biological families could have more successful supervised visits.

"The visits are the number one indicator of reunification, so we need the visits to be productive and conducive to building a bond between the parents and the children," Tittle says. "The more they can build that bond, the harder they are all going to work for reunification."

Creating a space that encouraged positive family time during these visits became the primary focus of Cox and her students.

"Having had [foster] kids before, I knew the real challenges with that — taking them to McDonald's and then picking them back up, and they didn't really visit," Cox says. "I believe that the physical environment around you has a very direct effect on things, including relationships as well as attitude, memory and connectivity. We take it for granted. It doesn't just look pretty, but our spaces really do physically and emotionally affect us. So to have a visit at DHS where you feel frustration and hurt and anger and trauma, they associate those bad feelings with [the visits at DHS]."

Senior thesis projects for interior design majors at Harding are focused on finding social issues that design can aid in solving. Three groups of seniors over the course of three years helped Cox with phases of the Sparrow's Promise remodel.

The first group of seniors focused on design research. They looked at the impact of the visits on everyone involved — children, biological parents and foster families — through research in the fields of psychology and social work.



"I think most people don't fully understand the amount of thought that has to go in even before you start laying out a space or picking out colors; you have to get the beginning of it right," Cox says. "You have to fully be able to empathize before you can design a space that has meaning and has a physical or emotional effect."

The research showed need for autonomy and connection. The small kitchenette, indoor rooms and backyard let families pick from a variety of activities. The activities and furniture in the rooms were selected specifically to encourage physical touch, comfort and memory making. The love-seat and rocker allow families to sit together, and the motion reduces stress for both parents and children. The bench seating allows for flexibility with larger family visits, and the games and toys were specifically selected to encourage children to connect with their families rather than playing alone. The mismatched accessories create a comfortable atmosphere; it's not a pristine space they will mess up.

"[Parents] have lost control when they lose their kids, and the courts are looking at them very harshly," Cox says. "They've pretty much lost control of everything. If they can kind of choose how they want to spend that visit, we thought that was important."

The role of the caseworker in the room was also given specific attention. Their presence, while necessary, needed to be noninvasive. Cox teaches her students each semester about the eight-foot triangle — you are unlikely to interact with anyone further than eight feet from you in a room. The long, narrow rooms allow the social worker to sit outside this eight-foot range.

The soft, cool color scheme of blues and greens alongside large windows for natural light were chosen to reduce stress, create calm and build a backdrop for memorable children's artwork.

"All those were decisions to create memory moments that, even if they don't go home to their parents, the last places that they visited their parents will be positive places," Cox says.

The second group of seniors who participated in the project worked with architect Mike Steelman to create an as-built floor plan of the existing building, a space plan and a layout. They measured walls, windows, doors and rooms and redesigned the layout to help the building change functions. After the students designed the interior, Steelman and Cameron Sunkel ('18), his intern at the time, worked on the structure and exterior architecture of the building.

Assistant professor of art Amy Cox ('98) guides the next group of senior studio interior architecture and design students through the completed Sparrow's Promise administrative wing and common areas, explaining the purpose behind decisions the previous students made throughout the three-year process.



“It was a team effort on the part of everybody, but I will say that interior design, including students, carried the majority of the load,” Steelman says. “Interior design is an amazing program at Harding. They do a great job in terms of educating students.”

Toria Adkison (’19), a member of the final senior class to work on the project, worked with Cox on a different level. She played a key role in painting the mural, communicating with suppliers and helping Cox pick the specific materials for the space.

“It was great to work on this project during school because I saw what professional design looks like firsthand,” Adkison says. “I met with the clients, negotiated with furniture dealers, and saw our ideas come to life during the course of my last year at Harding. Working alongside Amy Cox allowed me to apply practical design principles taught in our program. Sparrow’s Promise provided connections to a wonderful community in Searcy while boosting my confidence in design. It gave me hope that there is purpose in design, and I strive to carry that on as I work in the professional world.”

Even in the early stages of hosting visits in the completed center, differences in the visits at Sparrow’s Promise are already evident.

“Here you see parents down on the floor playing with their kids, which isn’t going to happen at an office or a restaurant,” Tittle says. “Seeing that interaction where the

parents get down on the same level with the kids — playing with them, sitting in the rocking chair feeding them bottles, it definitely seems more natural, calm and appreciated.”

Changes are not only being noticed by the staff at Sparrow’s Promise. The DHS workers are also noticing a difference through their interactions with the biological families.

“It has become, as DHS put it to me, the gold standard of the state,” Baker says. “I’m not sure we meant to be the gold standard. We just wanted to try to create something better than what was.”

### THE SAFE HAVEN & ADMINISTRATIVE WING

In the midst of the trauma of removing a child from their home, caseworkers have no designated place, other than their office, to go until a foster home is found and ready.

The Safe Haven, naturally created from the wing that was a day care, provides a place for social workers in White and Woodruff counties to bring children at any time of day. Donated supplies, a full bathroom and bedrooms are available to ease the transition and provide some comfort until a foster home is ready.

“That act of removal is traumatic, and everything that happens after that is stressful,” Tittle says. “They need a place to stay and wait. They used to be able, especially in the middle of the night, to take them to a hotel, but they can’t do that anymore, so they are just going back to their office. So we created this space. The initial trauma we

cannot take away, but we can reduce the stress of everything that happens after that by giving them a place that feels like a home.”

When the interior design students began laying out the administrative wing, they knew the final need for the building would be common spaces, a training room and a professional environment for the individuals who work at Sparrow’s Promise. In addition to helping families have more healthy spaces to connect, research shows that design also affects the workplace culture and worker retention.

“I know in the industry of social work, there’s a lot of turnover and burnout,” Cox says. “So that was a secondary thing I had in mind. These people, these case workers especially, are so emotionally involved day after day after day, all hours of the night. And so that was another one of my goals, even though they didn’t really ask for it. When they walk into work every day for them just to want to be there and feel supported.”

Off the main living space there is also a multipurpose training room that can be used to train foster families or for DHS to meet with biological families.

### THE COMPLETED REMODEL

With the completion of the project, Sparrow’s Promise is now a house with three wings that function independently.

“We were able to do that building far, far less expensively than it looks, and I think it’s important for people to know that we really were good stewards of their money,” Cox says.

Interior and architecture design students who were able to put their fingerprint on this development now have a real project in their portfolio and have experience working with professionals like Connell who says he saw no difference in working with them and working with other professionals already in the field.

“Most projects in school they design — it’s all hypothetical,” Cox says. “It never gets built. Even though three groups of seniors worked on it, they all get to now see it and have contributed along the way. That gets everybody in the program excited to do more community work like that. I couldn’t have done it if I didn’t have students.”

The project, which flowed right into Cox’s regular teaching, provided her a sense of pride both in the project and also in her students.

“Other projects that I’ve worked on I’ve been proud of, but I felt, when it was all said and done, that this place has a chance to really affect the lives of people,” Cox says. “Not every project has that much of an opportunity — that dramatic of an effect that it could. It was more than a building. It really gets at the heart of what they’re trying to do as a community.”



## Sparrow's Promise

Providing Hope for Children and Families



“Sparrow’s Promise is committed to providing **hope** for children and families. Our mission is to **care** for families by providing tools for **healing**.”



### SAFE HAVEN

The Safe Haven will provide a **safe** and **comfortable** space for children after being removed from home when an immediate placement is not available. Children will find **security, comfort** and **stability** during this traumatic time.

Cox, Baker, Tittle, Steelman and Connell all have been touched by Searcy Children’s Home through adoption or foster care, and now all their lives have been touched by helping Sparrow’s Promise continue the work began by Searcy Children’s Home — bettering the lives of the children in the community.

“Seeing and knowing what these kids go through on a day to day basis and just trying to do anything that we could to help alleviate a little bit of that pulls at the strings of the heart,” Connell says. “If you can do something that will give them a little bit of happiness for five minutes in their lives, we will jump through hoops to make that happen. We all wish there was a world where there was not a need for the foster care system, but that is not the case, and it’s not going to be the case. So we need places like Sparrow’s Promise that have a heart and want to do things for these foster kids to improve their lives and focus on those kids.”

On the first of three presentation boards, interior architecture and design students created a new layout and space plan based on the as-built layout with changes to the infrastructure made by architect Mike Steelman.



