A Desert Drive-In
MOS and OLIN

Inspired by the open, windswept desert landscape, the Ballroom Marfa Drive-In integrates art, architecture, and landscape architecture into a versatile space that will accommodate the many existing festivals in the area as well as smaller community gatherings. Designed by New York-based architects MOS and the Los Angeles office of landscape architects OLIN, the Drive-In proposes a transformative built landscape in Vizcaino Park.

“We hadn’t experienced weather as an object until we lived in Marfa,” said Michael Meredith, AIA, and Hilary Sample, AIA, founders of MOS. “The West Texas landscape naturally recedes into an infinite and scaleless distance, resisting a static sense of location or enclosure.” The design team thus sought a solution that would at once flow into the endless horizon and interrupt it.

The screen/bandshell rises from the molded site, which is marked by constructed geometric hills, valleys, and terraces. The screen will be made of 1/4” to 1/2” plate steel, and the site will accommodate film, music, and performance programming. The long grasses of the landscape architecture both frame the site and provide a unique sense of enclosure. Each hill, valley, and terrace is designed to create ideal viewing angles of the screen/bandshell for both parked cars and the seated audience.

Ballroom Marfa is a nonprofit contemporary arts organization recognized for its collaboration with Art Production Fund; their joint efforts resulted in the installation of “Prada Marfa,” a permanent sculpture by artists Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset. Drive-In benefited in 2011 from a $250,000 matching grant funded by the National Endowment for the Arts through the Our Town program, which supports projects demonstrating integrated strategies of creative placemaking in communities. Planned for completion in a few years, the Ballroom Marfa Drive-In will provide yet another reason to head west to this epicenter of culture in the Texas desert.