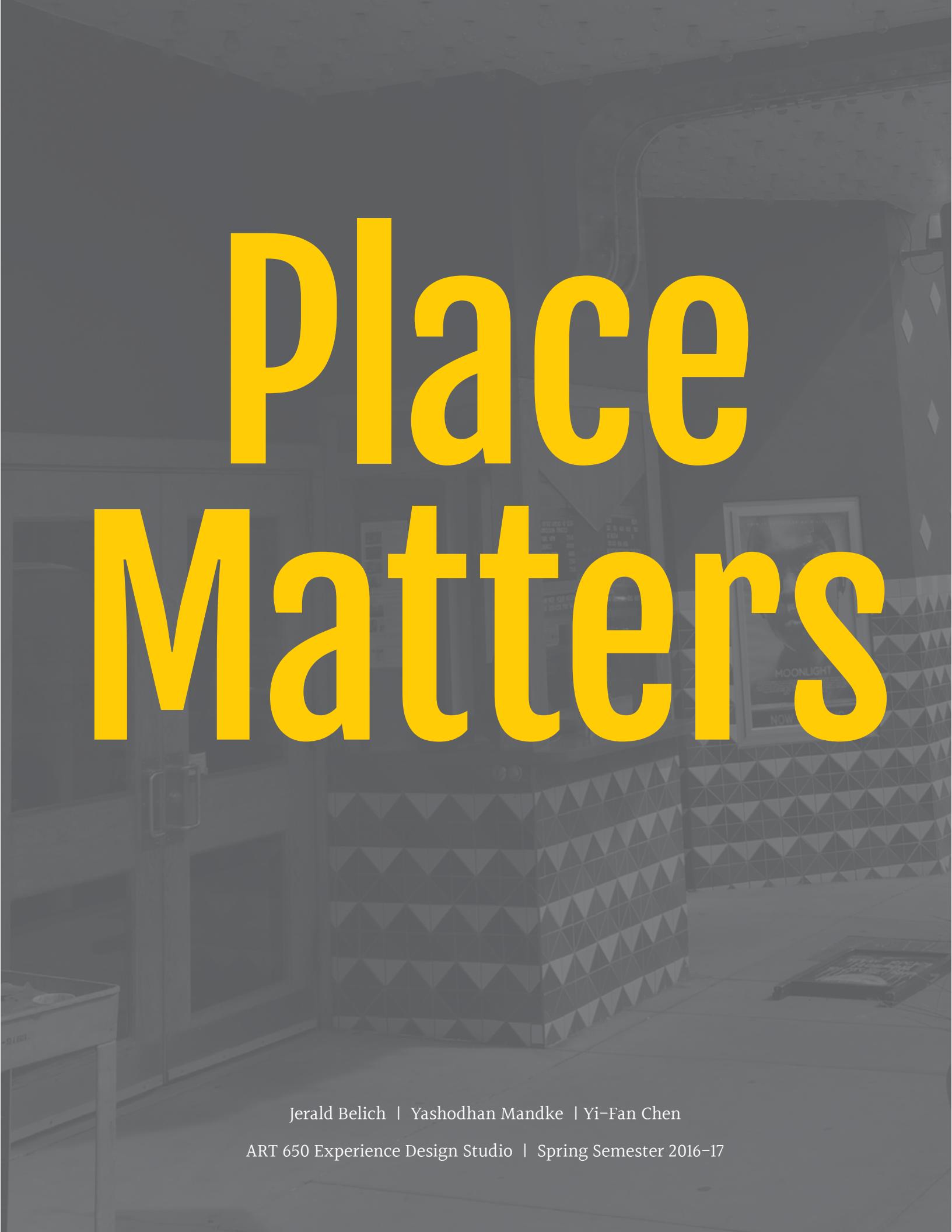


# Place Matters



Jerald Belich | Yashodhan Mandke | Yi-Fan Chen

ART 650 Experience Design Studio | Spring Semester 2016–17

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# Design Research Team Members

## Jerald Belich

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Jerry Belich is an alternative game designer, using hardware, electronics, and software to create immersive interactive and storytelling experiences. He is working to make creative prototyping and design more accessible, especially for aspiring interactive experience and game designers.

## Yashodhan Mandke

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Yashodhan Mandke is a UX & Visual Designer. He is training to be a design researcher & strategic experience designer. His interests aim to understand how new media can create a maximum impact on users with the advent of new technology focusing on Social Innovation, Systems Design & Customer Experience.

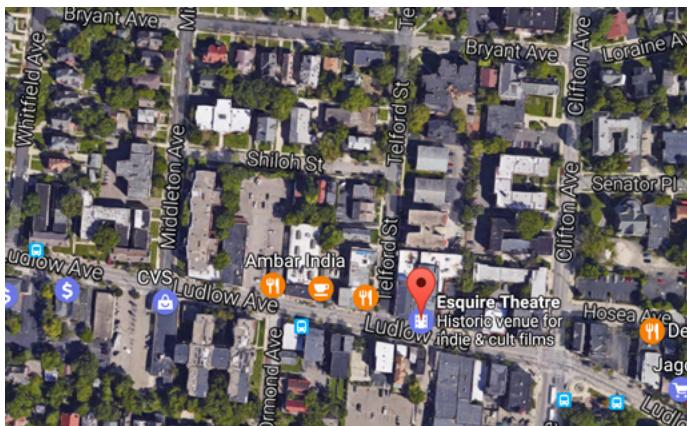
## Yi-Fan Chen

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Yi-Fan Chen's research interests aim to understand how users utilize mobile media to fulfill information and networking needs in everyday life. She is in training to be a design researcher to make more user-friendly mobile media to access information at a location with their social network co-present at the same time.

# Esquire Theatre Affordance

The Esquire Theatre is located at 320 Ludlow Ave, Cincinnati, OH 45220. We went to the location to conduct observations for three different times -- a Saturday afternoon, another Saturday evening, and a Wednesday afternoon in March 2017. Naturalistic observation method was used because we wanted to utilize observation without intervention. The naturalistic observation method allowed us to see how individuals act in natural settings (Spradley, 2016). Each visit took about two hours. The researchers observed both inside and outside the Esquire Theatre. The observations special focused on the interactions among the space, material, and people. During the afternoon, there were not many activities on the Ludlow Street and at the Esquire Theatre. The weather for both afternoons were cold. The Saturday evening, on the other hand, had lots people on the street and in the Esquire Theatre because it was the first warm day after a cold winter during the weekend. There were many families with little children on the Ludlow Street between Middletown Ave and Clifton Ave. All restaurants were full and the Greatest ice cream shop had a long waiting line. Traffic was bad and a musician played on the street. The smell of the street was delightful. In contrast, there was no people, no activities, and no street lights outside the area.

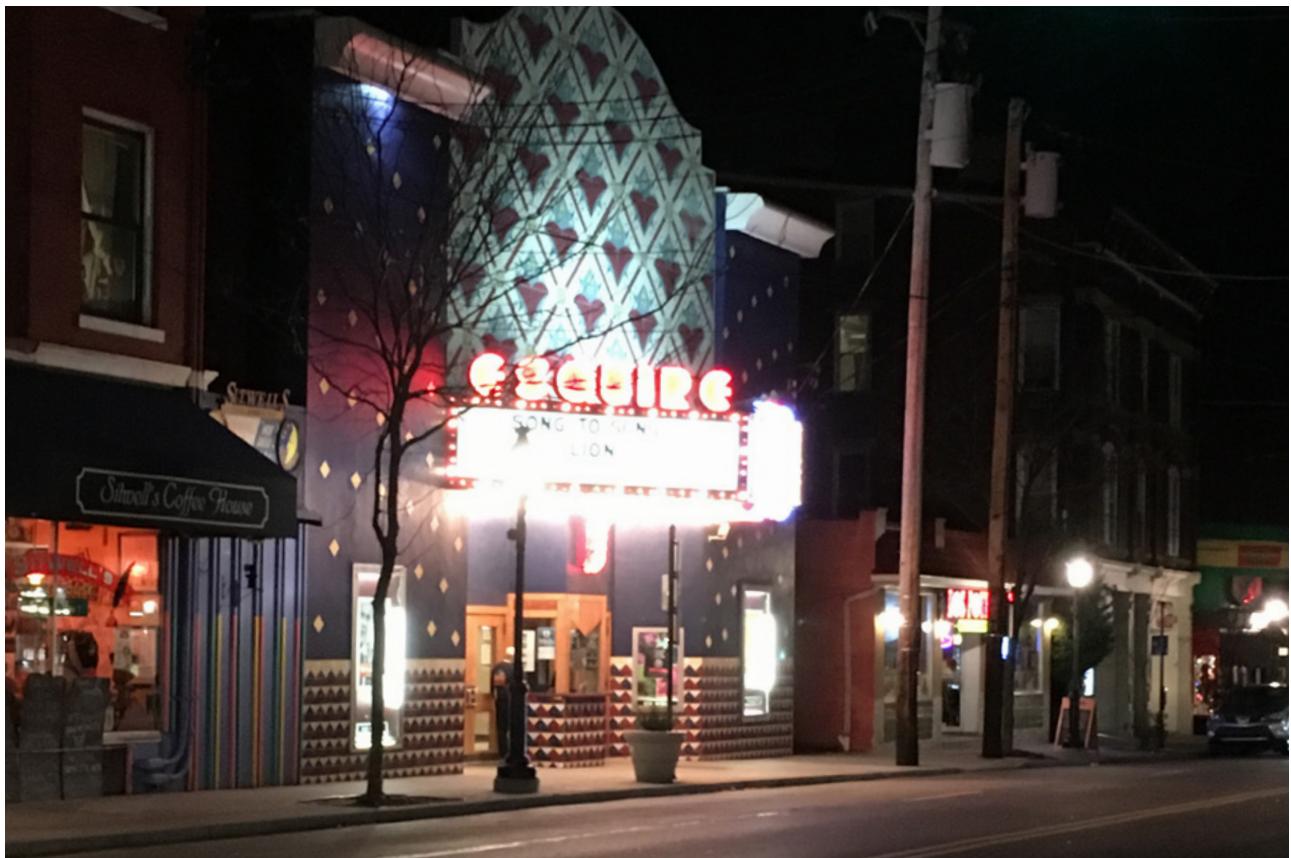
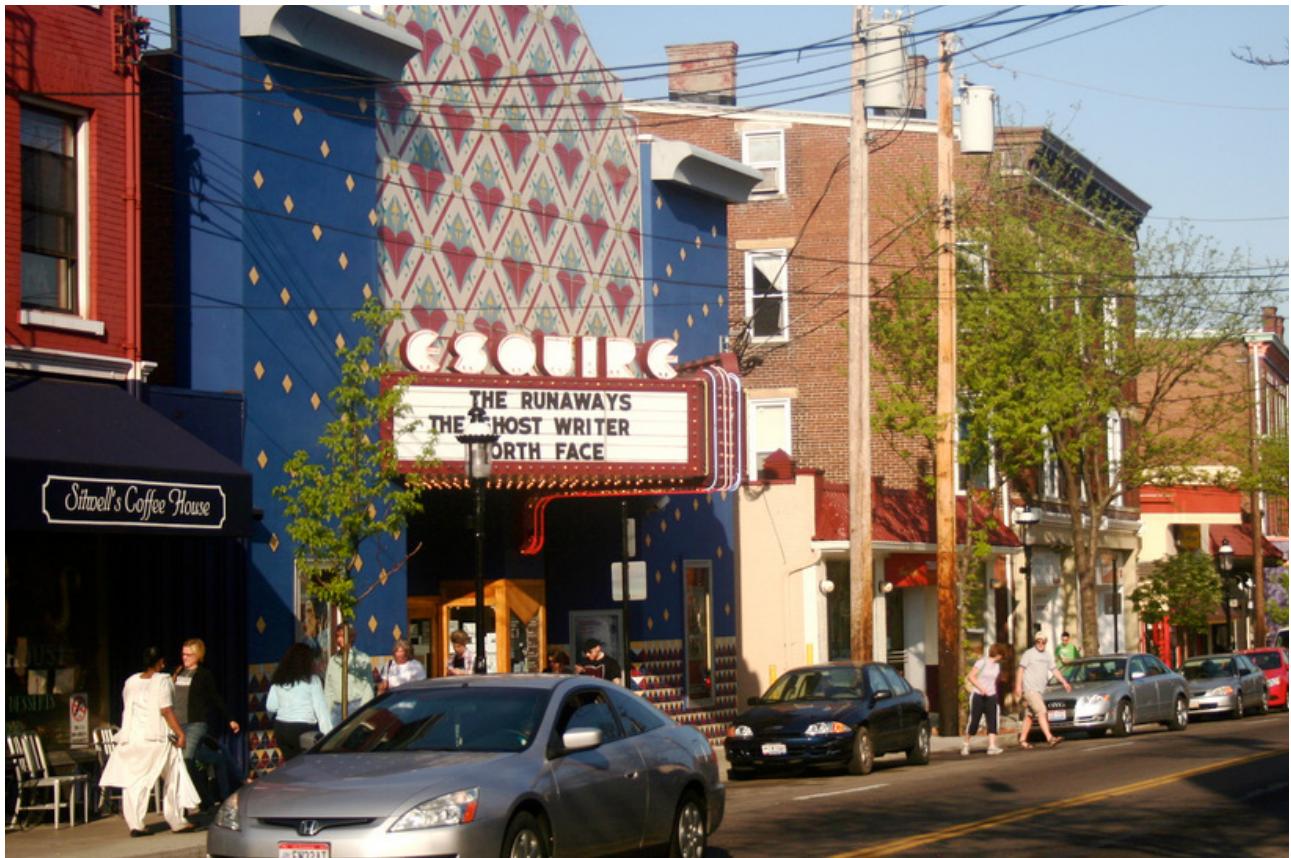


## Before entering the Esquire Theatre

The Esquire Theatre used bright colors and interesting patterns on the outside walls. The design made the Esquire Theatre stand up on the street. At night, the light designs were also different from other street and store lights. When users looked at the Esquire Theatre at the Ludlow Street, they immediately noticed this was a designed space for people to experience something interesting than outside world.

## Inside the Esquire Theatre

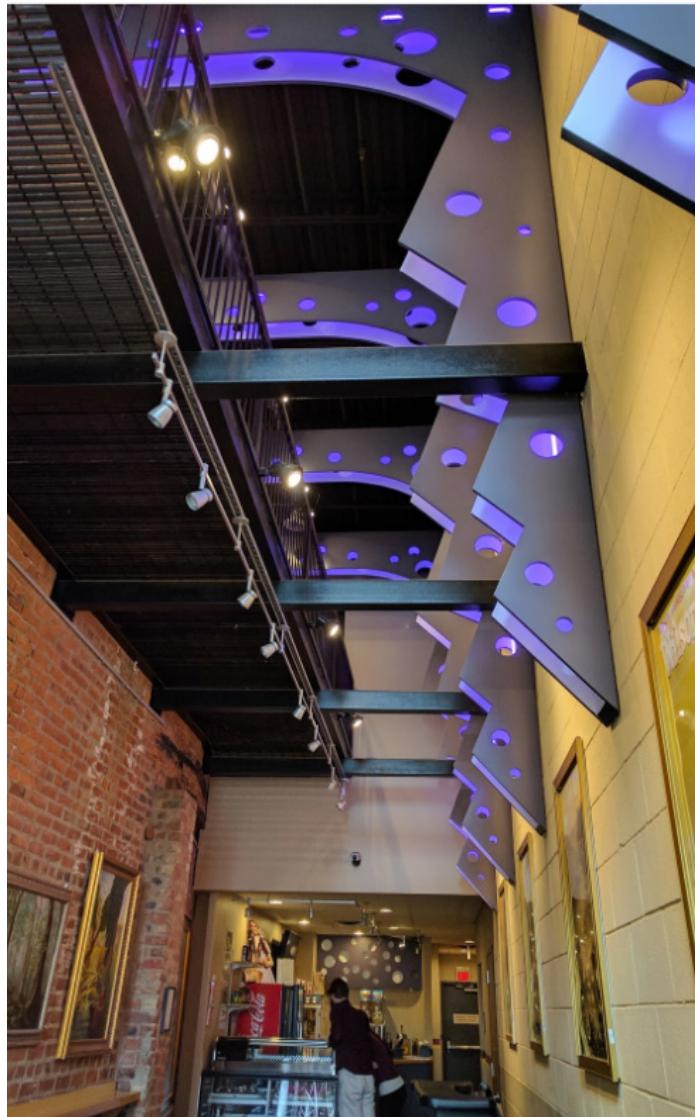
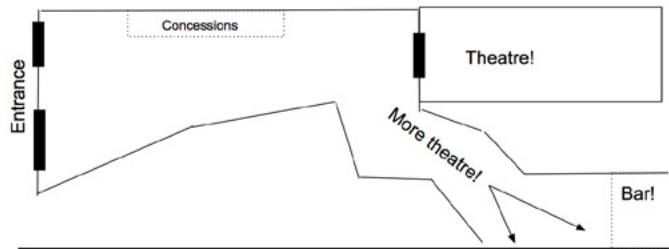
The Esquire Theatre has six screens/730-seats. Users need to wind around columns, corners, and stumble upon a hidden bar before getting to their theaters (please see the floor plan). There are paintings on the walls and special light fixtures to create a fantasy space to escape from the outside world. Each turn at the space has something interesting to surprise users and increase their curiosities before their films. Users could look up, look down and look around to experience the space. Moreover, when users entered the space, popcorns and hot dogs smell reminded them that they were in a movie theater. When they explored the space more and made a turn of the space, users could find this mystery space design with a hidden bar that was unlike other ordinary theaters smell.



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## Intimacy and Enclosure

You wind around columns, corners, and stumble upon a hidden bar before getting to your theatre.



## People at the Esquire Theatre

The staff at the Esquire Theatre seemed to be very welcome and friendly. Their conversations with users ranged from a particular film information to small talks such as weather, local events, and others. Users were observed in pairs with different age ranges. They seemed to be yuppie type personality. According to Hanson (2010),

“Yuppism is not definable entirely by income or class. Rather, it is a late-twentieth-century cultural phenomenon of self-absorbed young professionals, earning good pay, enjoying the cultural attractions of sophisticated urban life and thought, and generally out of touch with, indeed antithetical to, most of the challenges and concerns of a far less well-off and more parochial Middle America.”

Users seemed to know the theater well. They went directly to the counter where they could buy tickets, food, and drink and then went to their films directly. They seemed to visit the theater frequently so they did not have any trouble to interact with the unique space design.



## Community of the Esquire Theatre

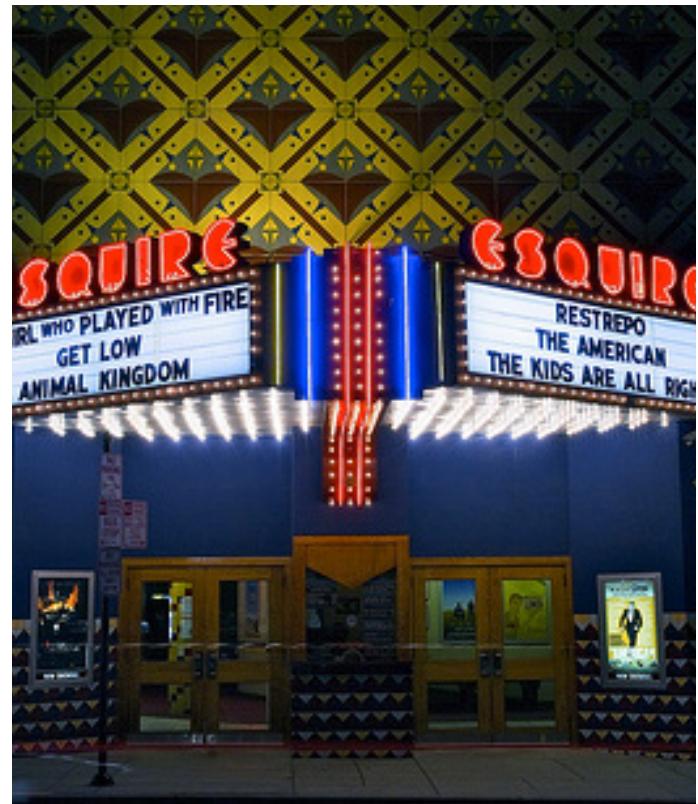
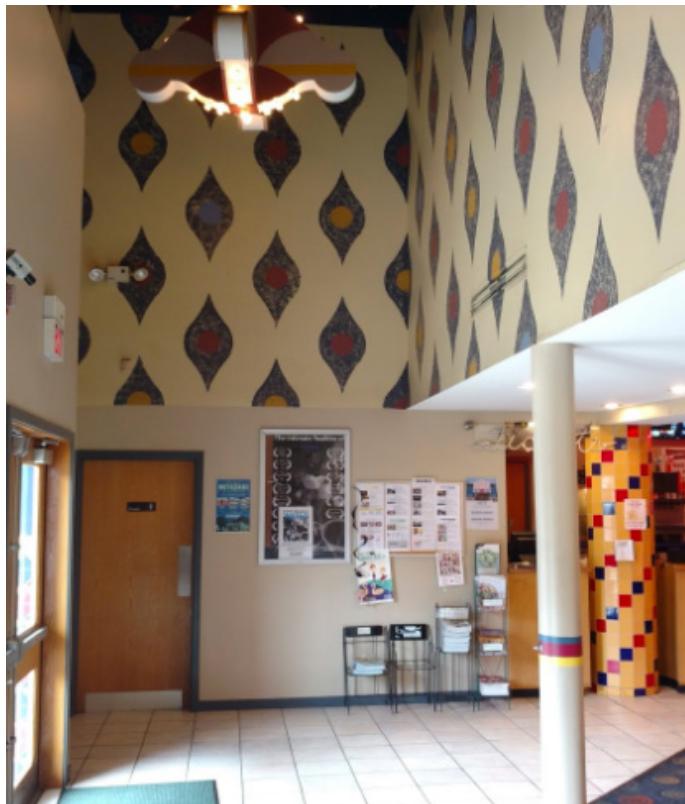
**A**s soon as entered the Esquire Theatre front door, there were flyers, brochures, posters, and leaflets with local information at the lobby. The Esquire Theatre also encouraged the local people to have their own parties and gathering at the theater. Users were allowed to book a room for their family and friends to meet for parties or screen films that they personal selected at the theater. The hidden bar area was an ideal space for family and family to gather together after works or during weekends to unwind. In addition, the sense of the community that the Esquire Theatre provided also including three other similar theaters in the nearby Cincinnati area-- Mariemont Theatre, Eastgate Brew & View, and Kenwood Theatre. Each theater ran different films. Users could find what other films ran at other theater if they cannot find one they liked from the Esquire Theatre. We observed that this strategy was a creative strategy for a small theater to compete with National Chain of Movie Theaters.



## Conclusions

**H**ere is a list of what we have learned are the Esquire Theatre affordance.

- The mystic arrangement of the environment surprises the users and also gives the element of surprise and the sense of exploring.
- The friendly staff gives you a feel of welcoming and comfortable environment.
- The effort to connect with the local population as well as making outsiders aware about the area is evident.
- The Esquire Theatre experience includes senses of smell, taste, and touch, as well as active visual perception, and indirect mode of symbolization.
- As users enter a space, it is important to engage quickly, helping them to shed their days.



# Cincinnati Escape Room Affordance

The design research team went to visit the Cincinnati Escape Room, located at 2300 Montana Ave in the Cincinnati on April 8 around noon.

## Before entering the Cincinnati Escape Room

The Cincinnati Escape Room is a big business building that is located on a hill and there is only a driveway to access it. Unlike the Esquire Theatre that has an outstanding building design, it is hard to tell there are escape rooms at the building from outside. Similar to the Esquire Theatre, the surrounding area of the Cincinnati Escape Room is also no people, no activities, and no street lights outside the building of the Cincinnati Escape Room area.

Before entering the building, there were signs on the wall but there were many texts to read in an uncomfortable space. The building door was locked and users needed to call to get the password to enter the Cincinnati Escape Room. These barriers increased confusion to the users. It was easy for the first time users to wondering if they were at the right place.

## Inside the Cincinnati Escape Room

There were three different escape rooms and there was only a waiting room at the Cincinnati Escape Room. Users were waiting at the room and wondering around. On a wall in the room, only a big sign with an unclear logo was in there. On another wall, there were T-shirts with the unclear logo to be sold. A register counter occupied about 20% of the space. One interesting wall that allowed users to pin their home locations at two maps. Setting areas were limited. The space was for users both entering and exiting

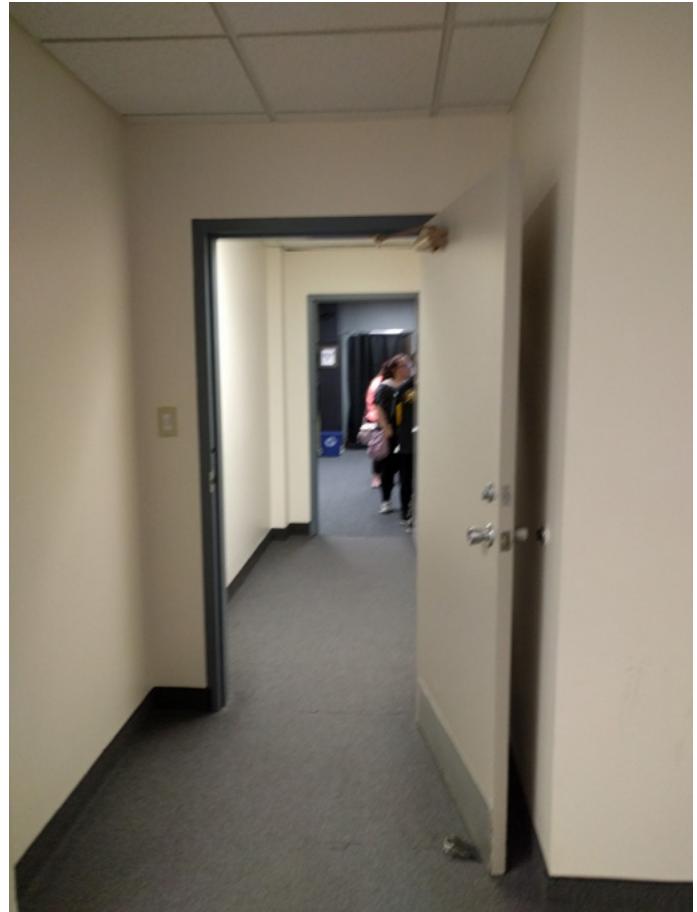
the escape rooms. Users had very limited things to do beside waiting to enter the rooms or waiting for their friends to exit the rooms. Learning from the Esquire Theatre space design that every turn and corner has some small things to excite their users and make their before and after films experiences more memorable, we recommend the Cincinnati Escape Room makes the space more interactive with their users.

## People at the Cincinnati Escape Room

Users at the Cincinnati Escape Room were excited and delightful. The staff might not be very professional. When we arrived, it was about lunch time. Users can smell food in the small waiting room area. We think that there are opportunities for staff to interact with users before, during and after the game to make their experiences memorable.

## Community of the Cincinnati Escape Room

The Cincinnati Escape Room seemed to be a small business without community connections.



Please click on this video screen to watch the current Cincinnati Escape Room Experience

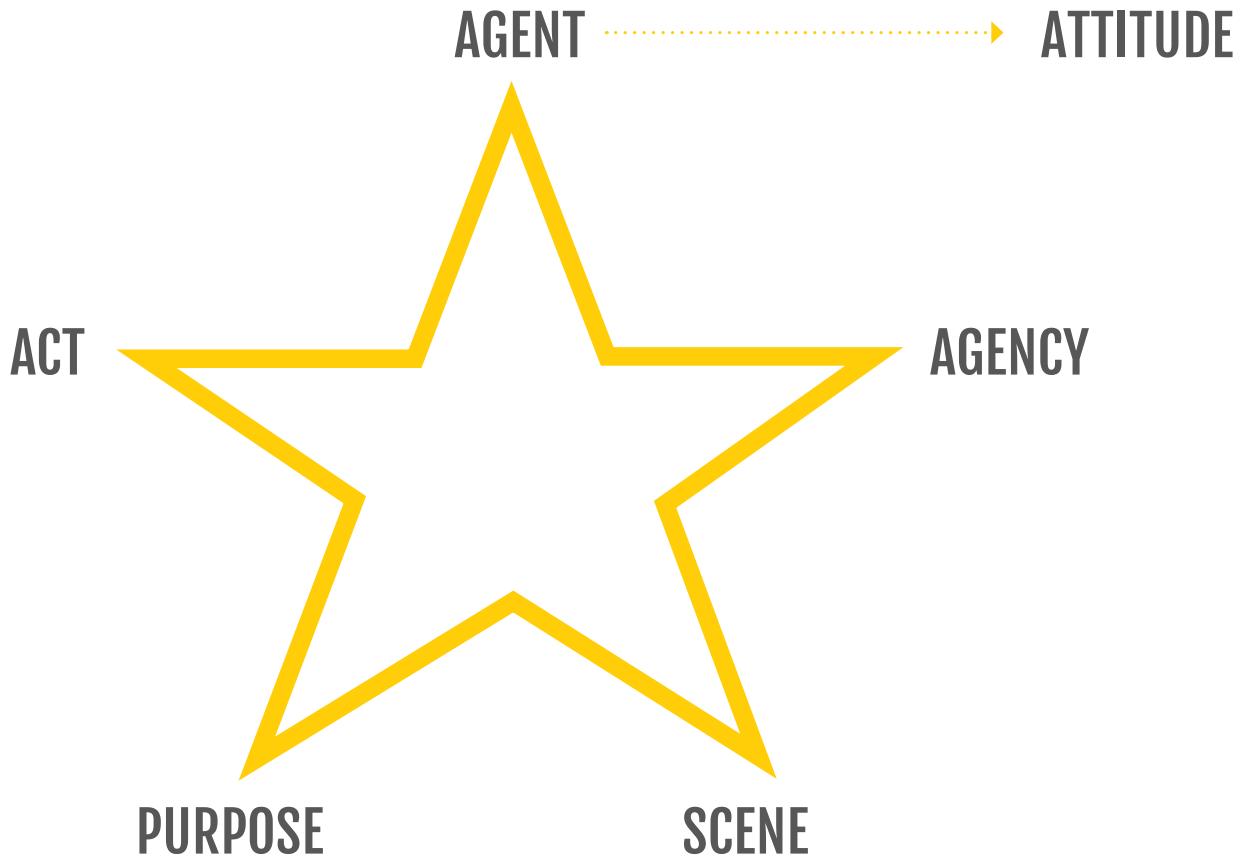
# Theoretical Framework

Kenneth Burke's Dramatism Theory provides us a theoretical framework to our design process. Dramatism compares life to a drama and provides the most direct route to human motives and human relations (Blakesley, 2002). According to Burke (1945, 1950, 1968), just as in any plays, the acts in life are keys to revealing human motives. Dramatism provides researchers a method to examine the relationship between human, text, and environments. Grove and Fish (1992) examined applying Dramatism Theory to the marketing of services. Services are formed by the interaction between service providers and customers (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985; Sasser, Olsen, & Wyckoff 1978). Grove and Fish (1992) argued Dramatism Theory is a human interaction model that provides insights most effectively when examining face-to-face interactions among people. As a result, Dramatism Theory can be very relevant to describing service encounters. Kenneth Burke (1945, 1950, 1968) and Erving Goffman (1959, 1967, 1974) argue that people interact with each other differently based on their settings, situations, and purposes.. The theory considers the broad issue of communication, both verbal and nonverbal, and the connection between the two (Brissett & Edgley 1990). Dramatism studies the ways in which languages and symbols and their usage relate to audiences (Burke, 1945; 1950; 1968). Grove and Fisk (1991) proposed that the service experience as theater could better assist observational research to capture the processual and subjective nature of the service product. In our study, we aim to utilize the service experience as theater to design a service system. When a user enters the Esquire Theatre, he or she is experiencing a designed space for the user to relax, unwind, and escape from day-to-day stress for a given time period. We decided to use what we have learned from the Esquire Theatre experience to design affordable and implementable solutions to improve the Cincinnati Escape Room experience, and others like it. Both the Esquire Theatre and the Cincinnati Escape Room provide their services to

their customers.

In his book A Rhetoric of Motives, Burke (1950) proposes a new rhetoric. The difference between Aristotle and Burke's persuasion is identification. Burke asserts that all things have substances that comprise their general nature. The identification is when two people have overlap in their substances. The more overlap exists, the greater the identification between two people. On the other hand, when two people fail to have overlap in their substances, Burke calls it "division". Burke's guilt/redemption cycle can be assuaged as a result of identification and divisions. Guilt is the key motivation for all symbolic interactions between people. According to Burke, people feel guilt and try to reduce their discomfort from the guilt.

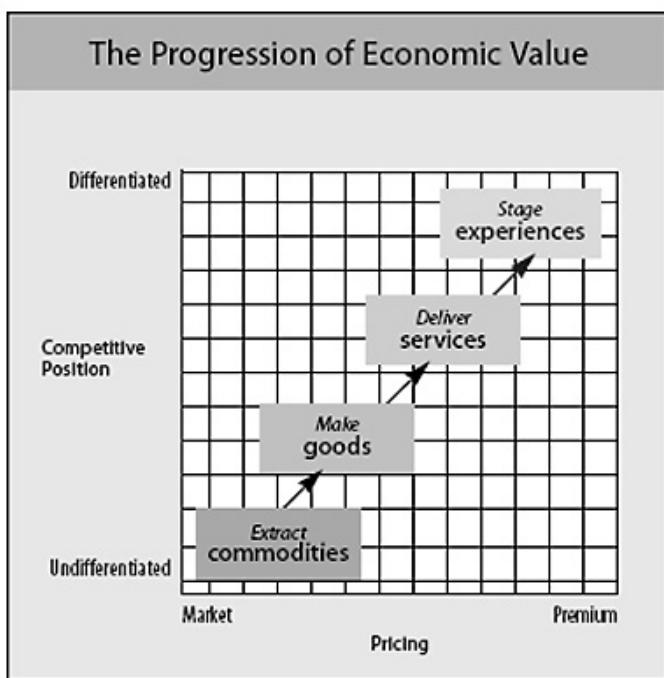
Burke (1945) create the pentad, a method of applying his theory to understand the symbolic interactions. Burke's pentad includes act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose. The act is basically what is done by a person. The agent is the person who performing the act. The agency is what the person uses to perform the act (methods and technologies, such as storytelling, message strategies, speech making). The scene is the context surrounding the act and finally the purpose is why the act takes place.



In our design for the Cincinnati Escape Room, we are first going to carefully compare and contrast the users' substances between the Esquire Theatre and the Cincinnati Escape Room. Then, we are going to consider substances, identification, guilt, and apply the pentad as the design method to create a meaningful user experiences at the Cincinnati Escape Room.

# Design Solution

Economists have typically related experience design in with services. However, Pine and Gilmore (1988), on the other hand, argue that experiences are a distinct economic offering. They are different from services because services are from goods. They call experiences as the progression of economic value because more and more businesses are responding consumers desire experiences by designing and promoting them. In the case, businesses command a fee to design engaging experiences for their consumers (please see figure, Pine & Gilmore, 1988, p. 98).



Pine and Gilmore(1988) further economic distinctions between service and experience (please see chart, Pine & Gilmore, 1988, p. 98) and the quote as the followed.

"An experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event. Commodities are fungible, goods tangible, services intangible, and experiences memorable" (Pine & Gilmore, 1988, p. 98).

## Economic Distinctions

Economic Offering	Commodities	Goods	Services	Experiences
Economy	Agrarian	Industrial	Service	Experience
Economic Function	Extract	Make	Deliver	Stage
Nature of Offering	Fungible	Tangible	Intangible	Memorable
Key Attribute	Natural	Standardized	Customized	Personal
Method of Supply	Stored in bulk	Inventoried after production	Delivered on demand	Revealed over a duration
Seller	Trader	Manufacturer	Provider	Stager
Buyer	Market	User	Client	Guest
Factors of Demand	Characteristics	Features	Benefits	Sensations

**C**ustomer participation and the connection, or environmental relationship, that unites customers with the event or performance are two key dimensions of users' experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1988). Pine and Gilmore (1988) suggest that designing a memorable experience include to theme the experience, harmonize impressions with positive cues, eliminate negative cues, mix in memorabilia, and engage all five senses. In our project, we are going to design a memorable experience than a service that the Cincinnati Escape Room currently offers to its users. We wish with the new design, users will value what the new Cincinnati Escape Room reveals over a duration of time. Our design aims to offer users commodities, goods, and services as well as engaging users on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level. And, we begin our design with two personas.

## Personas of the Cincinnati Escape Room

**JACKSON BOND**  
CINCINNATI, OHIO

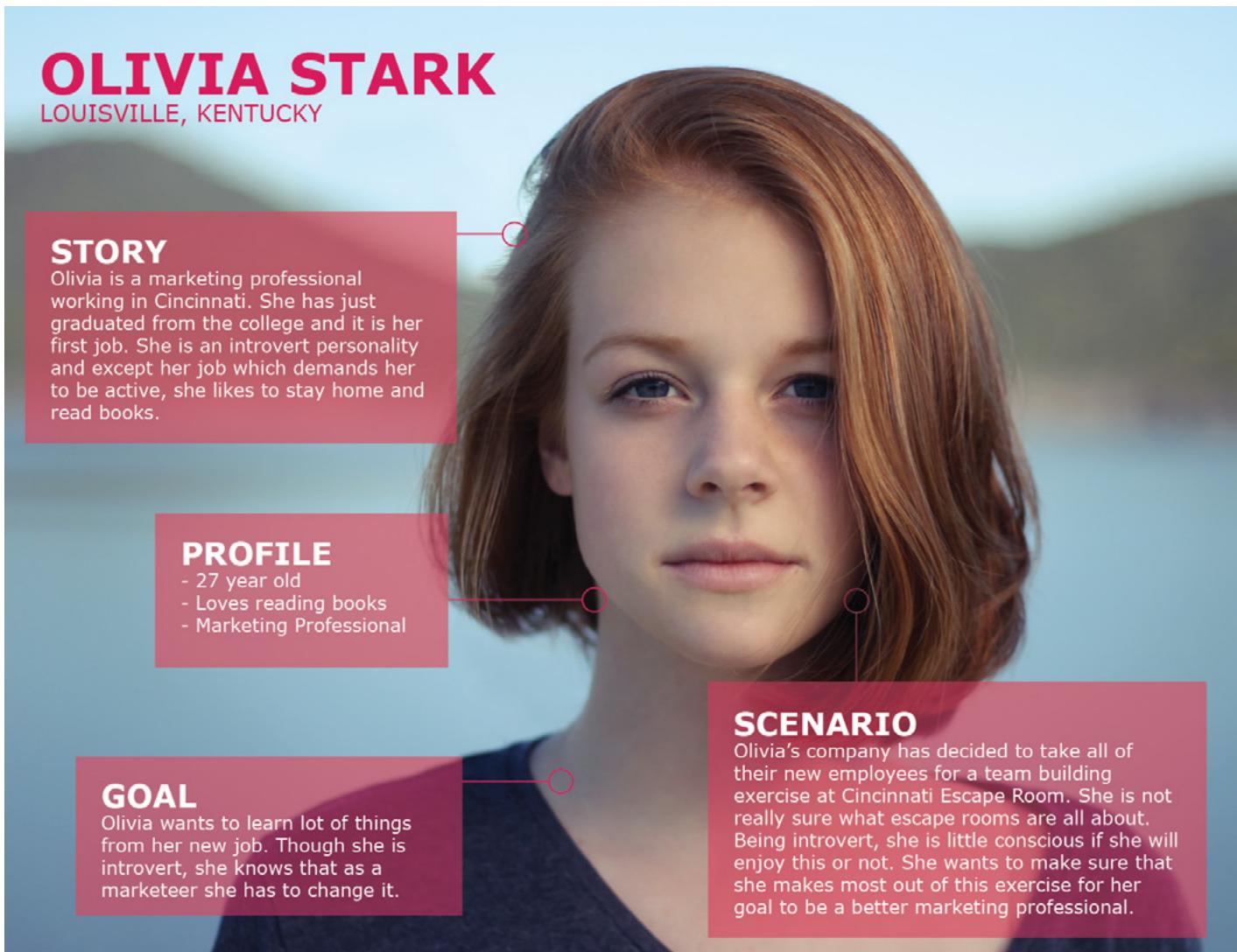
**STORY**  
Jackson, is a college student in University of Cincinnati. He loves solving puzzles and mysteries. A huge fan of Sherlock Holmes. Loves going with his friends to Escape room to quench his thirst for Adventure.

**PROFILE**  
- 24 year old gamer  
- Loves challenges  
- Senior College Student

**GOAL**  
Jackson wants to conquer all the escape rooms in USA and he believe if Escape room was in Olympics, he would definitely win a gold medal.

**SCENARIO**  
Jackson has always loved the challenges about Escape room. His friends often wonder why does he enjoy it so much? Thus he wants to take all of his friends to Cincinnati Escape Room to make them experience the adventure and the fun that makes him go to Escape rooms again and again. He is like a brand ambassador for the escape rooms!

## Personas of the Cincinnati Escape Room



**OLIVIA STARK**  
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

**STORY**  
Olivia is a marketing professional working in Cincinnati. She has just graduated from the college and it is her first job. She is an introvert personality and except her job which demands her to be active, she likes to stay home and read books.

**PROFILE**  
- 27 year old  
- Loves reading books  
- Marketing Professional

**GOAL**  
Olivia wants to learn lot of things from her new job. Though she is introvert, she knows that as a marketeer she has to change it.

**SCENARIO**  
Olivia's company has decided to take all of their new employees for a team building exercise at Cincinnati Escape Room. She is not really sure what escape rooms are all about. Being introvert, she is little conscious if she will enjoy this or not. She wants to make sure that she makes most out of this exercise for her goal to be a better marketing professional.

# Experience Maps



**Jackson Bond**

**Cincinnati Escape Room Experience Map**

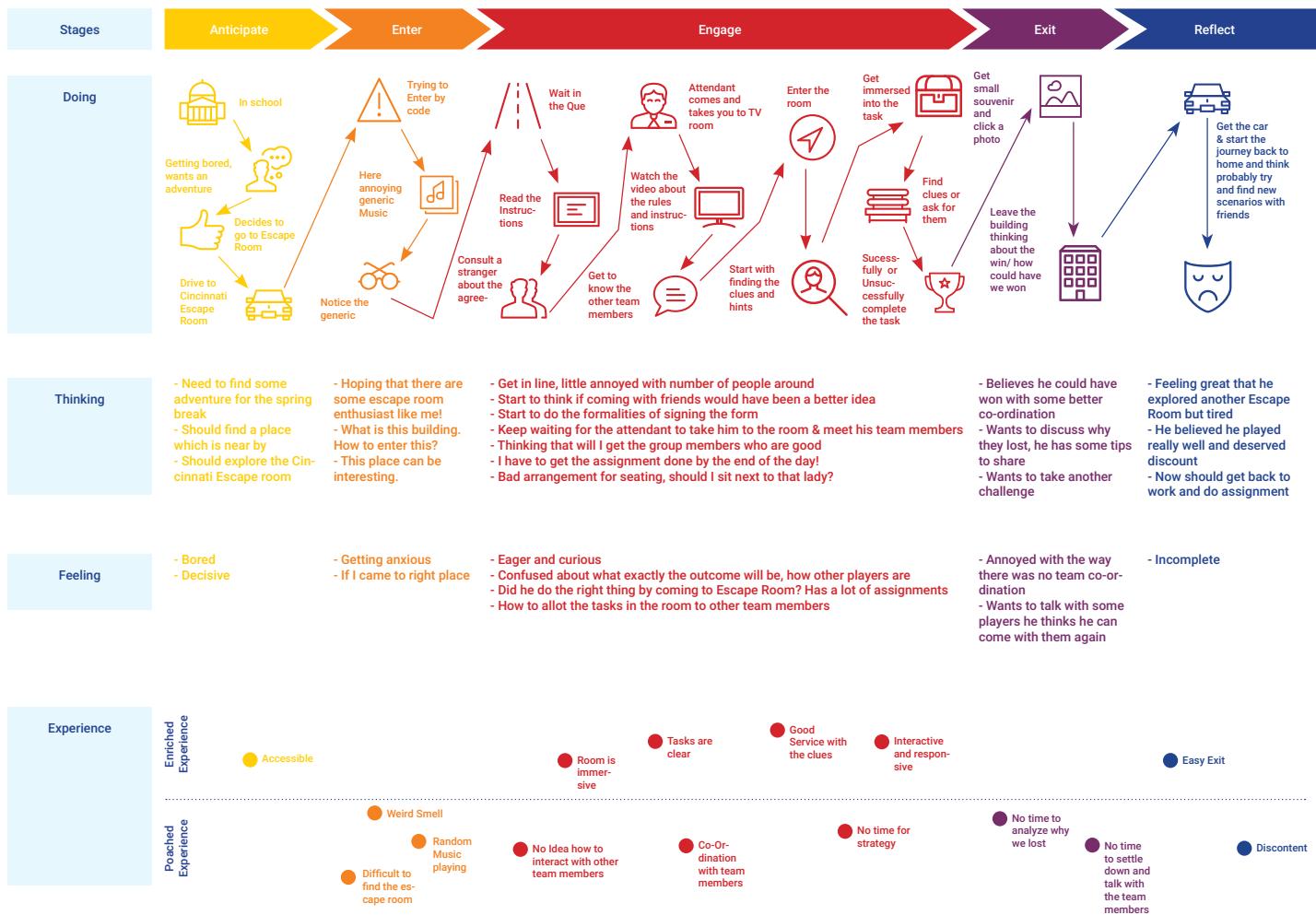
## Guiding Principles

Loves to solves mysteries and puzzles. An escape room challenge is never far away!

Wants people to experience the fun and excitement of the Escape Rooms.

Escape room gives an opportunity to Jackson to escape from your daily redundant routine in University.

## Customer Journey



## Experience Maps



**Olivia Stark**  
**Cincinnati Escape Room Experience Map**

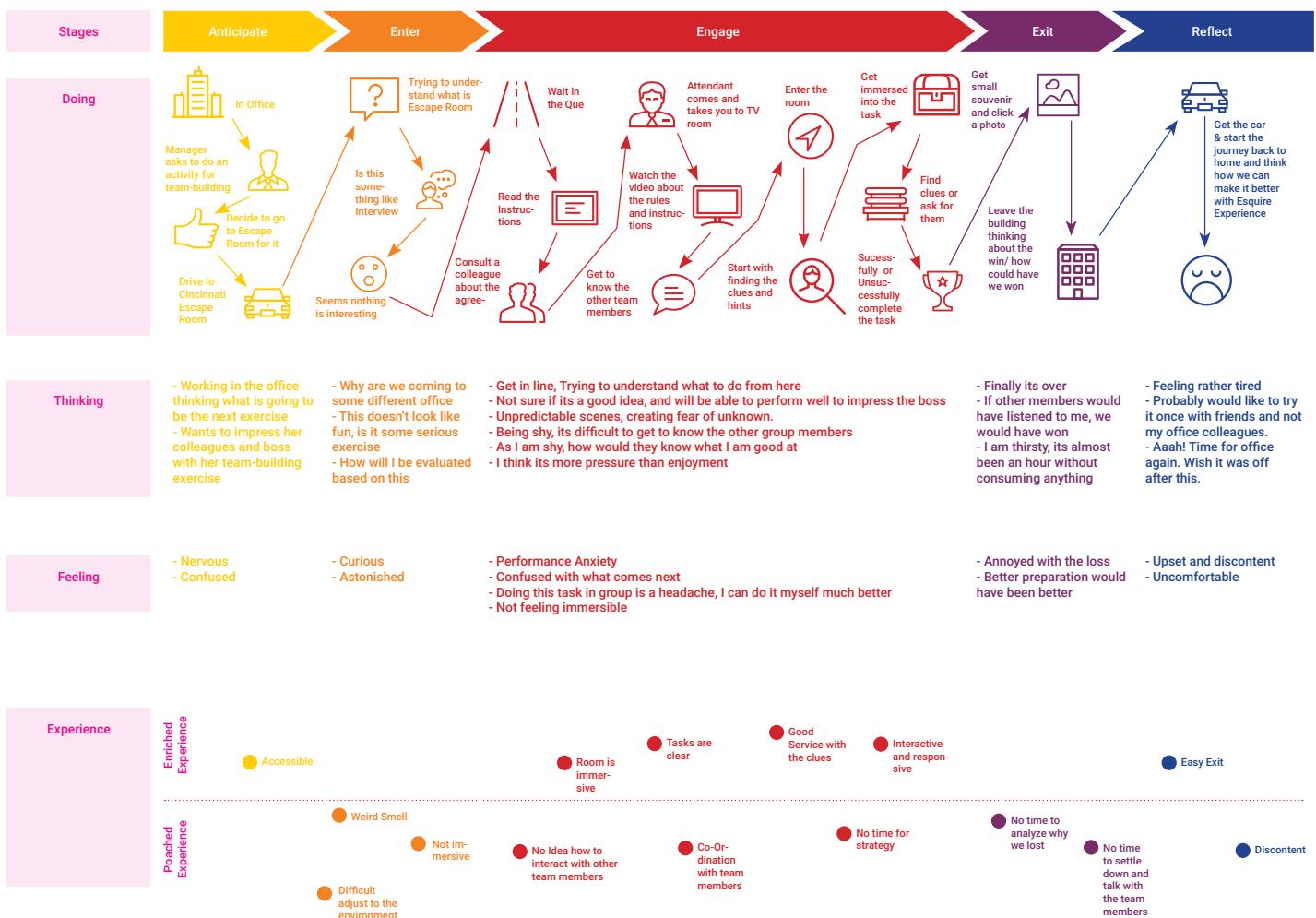
### Guiding Principles

Olivia prefers going to Escape room as a good source for professional development.

It's great to experience the activity which you have not experienced before.

Escape room gives an opportunity to escape from your daily redundant routine.

### Customer Journey



## Primary Targets for Solutions

The escape-the-room experience is comprised of more than the time allocated inside the game rooms. These rooms are designed with particular scenarios and time limits in which to complete the provided set of goals. It is not this period of time that we are interested in applying new design solutions, but rather the time leading up to (primarily) and extending after the core experience. Going to see a movie, such as at the Esquire, is more than just walking into the theater to sit, and walking out without a word. The spaces, sights, sounds, and even smells do much to set expectations and prepare you for what is to come, and subsequently your return to reality. The Esquire showed us how impactful all of those attributes can be on your overall enjoyment of watching a film, even though their design has no connection to the film itself. Close your eyes and consider a visit to any movie theater. What do you see? What sort of lighting is used? Can you smell the popcorn? It is a timeless place allowing for a mish-mash of styles, but all to a purpose. The outside world is shed like old skin.

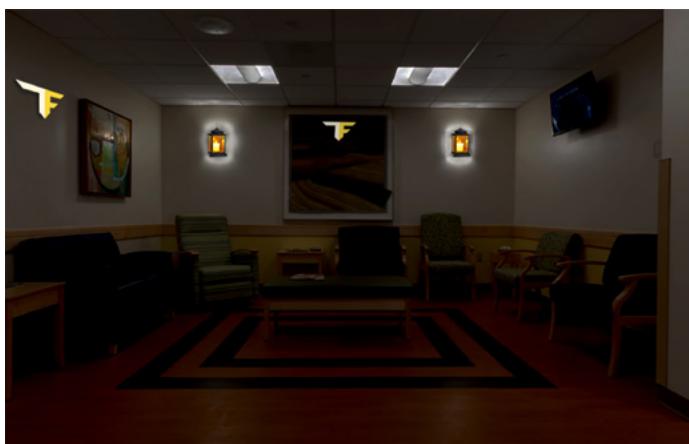
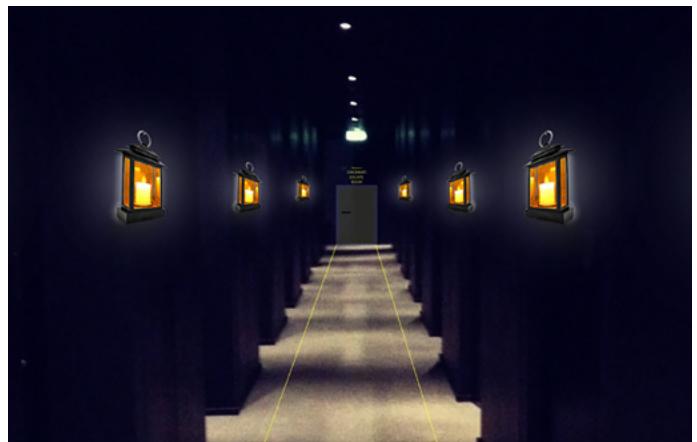
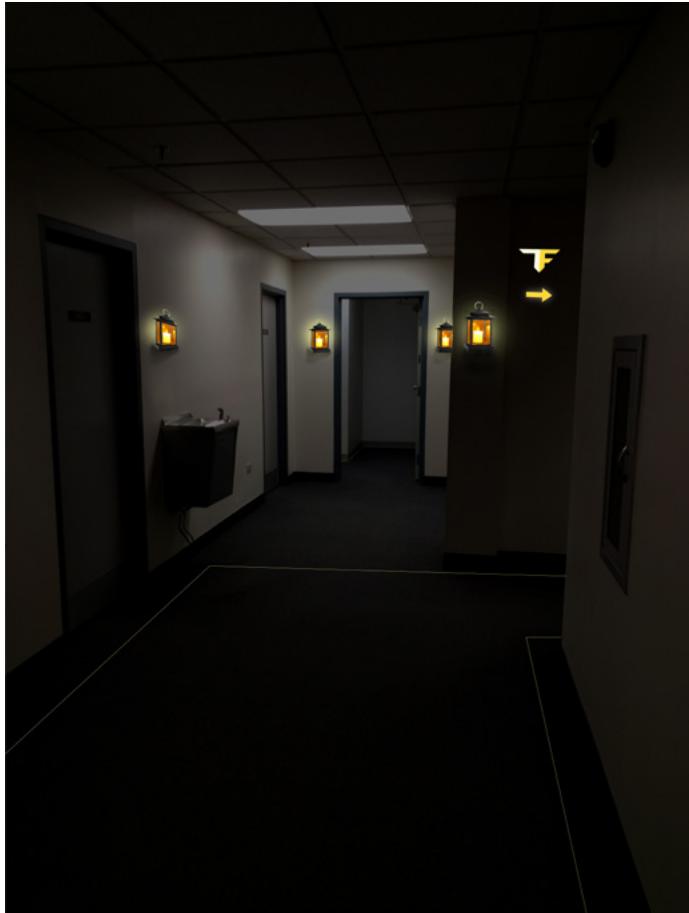
We have discovered a class of escape-the-room businesses that focus their resources so tightly onto the core game that the surrounding periods of time, the onboarding and unpacking, give the impression of being afterthoughts to the rest of the design work. The contrast is striking as the game rooms themselves are usually quite impressive with the amount of detail and effort that obviously went into them. The lack of forethought actually eats into the core game time as customers are not yet prepared for what they are about to do. Imagine heading straight from work to see a movie, walking directly from a busy street in the bright afternoon to a dark theater. You sit, and instead of even a single movie preview it begins to play. We posit that in this scenario the enjoyment and even retention of events in the film would be severely diminished for an appreciable amount of the film's beginning. Even being distracted for six minutes would comprise five percent of an average film, and for an escape-the-room experience six minutes would be a full ten percent!

The lack of afterthought can in turn dramatically affect the memories of your experience and their quality, tarnishing

your lasting impression. Whether good or bad, it is a common phenomenon for audience members of a movie to discuss their mutual experience. Game rooms are not only sights and sounds, but highly participatory, and include successful or failed outcomes. These additional components serve to raise the importance of coming to terms with the shared experience, to not just find and clarify the story as with watching a movie, but actually define the story and their roles in it. To withhold a chance for the participants to process is wasteful, sticking their brains in a bucket of reality ice water needlessly. Could we not also compare this to the moment you wake from a dream? If you don't examine the dream immediately it simply fades away like so much smoke, but when it is considered the details remain vivid and retainable. The nature of games such as these includes pushing many participants outside of their comfort zones. You want to provide them a thrill certainly, but the emotional net must be in place if you ever want them to return.

When we speak of the class of escape-the-room business as above, we speak of small businesses without large amounts of startup capital, and likely a similar amount of business experience. Our design solutions are meant to be affordable applications that would increase the quality of customer experience, loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and revenue per customer. It is our belief through observation and research that there are many areas of low hanging fruit, so to speak, where a small but targeted investment in time and money would provide a reliably and significant return.

As a result, many of our solutions have the potential to go much further and deeper than outlined, but are restricted deliberately to stay within our fuzzy definition of what we consider to be within the means of these businesses, specifically the Cincinnati Escape Room business which serves as our design canvas.



The Mock-Ups of various stages of experience design for the escape room

## Onboarding

**A**s Tuan (1977) makes clear, experience is made up from all of our senses. This provides us with a host of tools with which to work, but to what end? At the core, what is our (and what should be the business') goal for how we affect the people that come to play? One of the limitations inherent in the resource minded scope of our solutions include the inability to design significantly different onboarding procedures for all possible game scenarios. As a result we were forced to confront these questions head on. What are the common factors that improve the experience universally, whether you are an anxious and unwilling participant on a company retreat or a gung-ho game lover that just wants to get to the fun?

After much consideration we reduced our thoughts down to two simple goals. We want the onboarding to focus and relax the participants. We design a small act to greet participants based on Burke's pentad of the Dramatism Theory (1945, 1950, 1968), which focuses on act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose. We have the staff as agents to play the act and interact with participants before entering the game rooms. We redesign the entering space (i.e., scene) with visual, touch and smell materials. You can review how we design the visual and touch with storytelling in the space in our video presentation. In addition, we research several different scents for the space. After the many tries, we find a custom made fragrance for our project with an expert's help. The manager of the Yankee Candle at Bridgewater Falls is an expert of the fragrance design. She is also an escape-room lover and a Disney travel representative. She loves mixed fragrance and entertainment. She picks three different scents to create an earthy, cave-feeling, and mystery smell for our project. The games themselves already do a good job tapping into your stress and anxiety, and they also require that you are ready to play the moment you enter the rooms if you want to do a good job. Much like going to the movies, the person you were when you entered the space needs to be shed, to make room

for the new and the novel. No persons burdens are alike, but we all carry them. Immersive entertainment can't get rid of your burdens but it can them off your shoulders for a short time, but to do so is a process.

By providing participants focus, they are no longer thinking about those burdens, or even positive but distracting thoughts. They are ready to take in something new. By relaxing them, they are able to slow down their minds and will be more able to think clearly during the stressful challenges ahead. It gives them clarity and patience. The anxious corporate employee is less worried, and the excited game player doesn't break immersion for those around them as they all pay attention, not to each other, but to what is being served before them.

To measure success is simple. Do you have a group of quiet and attentive participants? Or are they chatty, with nervous energy conducting through each individual? The former means they are ready and waiting, and most importantly, open to the experience to come. The work put into each game room is immense, and so it is also respectful to the designers to put participants into their space in the most receptive state possible.

Please click on this video screen to watch the designed Onboarding experience for Cincinnati Escape Room

## Unpacking

**I**t's over. Successful or not, the hour is up and your adrenaline begins to subside. You might laugh, sigh, even grumble in frustration as your mind quickly races over the events of the past sixty minutes while also taking in the reactions of the other participants, your team, your friends? Of course, this can only last a few moments because a worker is already ejecting you from the space, herding you like so much cattle to the killing floor for your photo together. Now thrust back into the afternoon, piercing sunlight dilates your physical and mind's eye, the details of the game already jumbling together as you discuss the plans for the remainder of the afternoon and who rides with who. Whether you escaped or were just a few minutes away, it felt cruel to be ripped away from the fantasy so quickly.

The human mind is incredible in its capacity to calibrate emotional response for events large, small, real, and fiction. Having the time to come down from an experience does much to improve your feelings about it and in the case of escape rooms, could also be profitable in the process. When the experience isn't solo, it also helps to strengthen the bond with your comrades, a story shared by all. In our experience, players were quickly moved out of the business space as they worked with incoming players, a clash of moods and emotions from both sides of the game, from anticipation to deflation. Most businesses have multiple rooms, so a customer once does not mean they are tapped. Just as Disney places ride goers into gift shops designed in the same vein of the rides themselves, escape rooms could hold onto, but taper off, the feeling of their rooms. It is the perfect time to upsell and perhaps even provide a discount redeemable only in that visit for another game. Scheduling could remain loose, but getting the commitment of sale almost doubles the income from a single customer and with an entire group together, you've also just made their job coordinating that much easier.

Provide low cost beverages that encourage slow sipping

such as coffee and tea to keep people milling about. Adorn the exit room with video trailers and details for other rooms, cheap puzzles and toys to purchase that serve as mementos, and even visits from some of the actor employees to banter and keep the fun going, possibly ease a few sore spirits. Has anyone ever gone to Disney and not returned with at least one momento? Perhaps, but probably not because they didn't want one. Tokens like these are external storage for highly sensory memories that can last a lifetime.

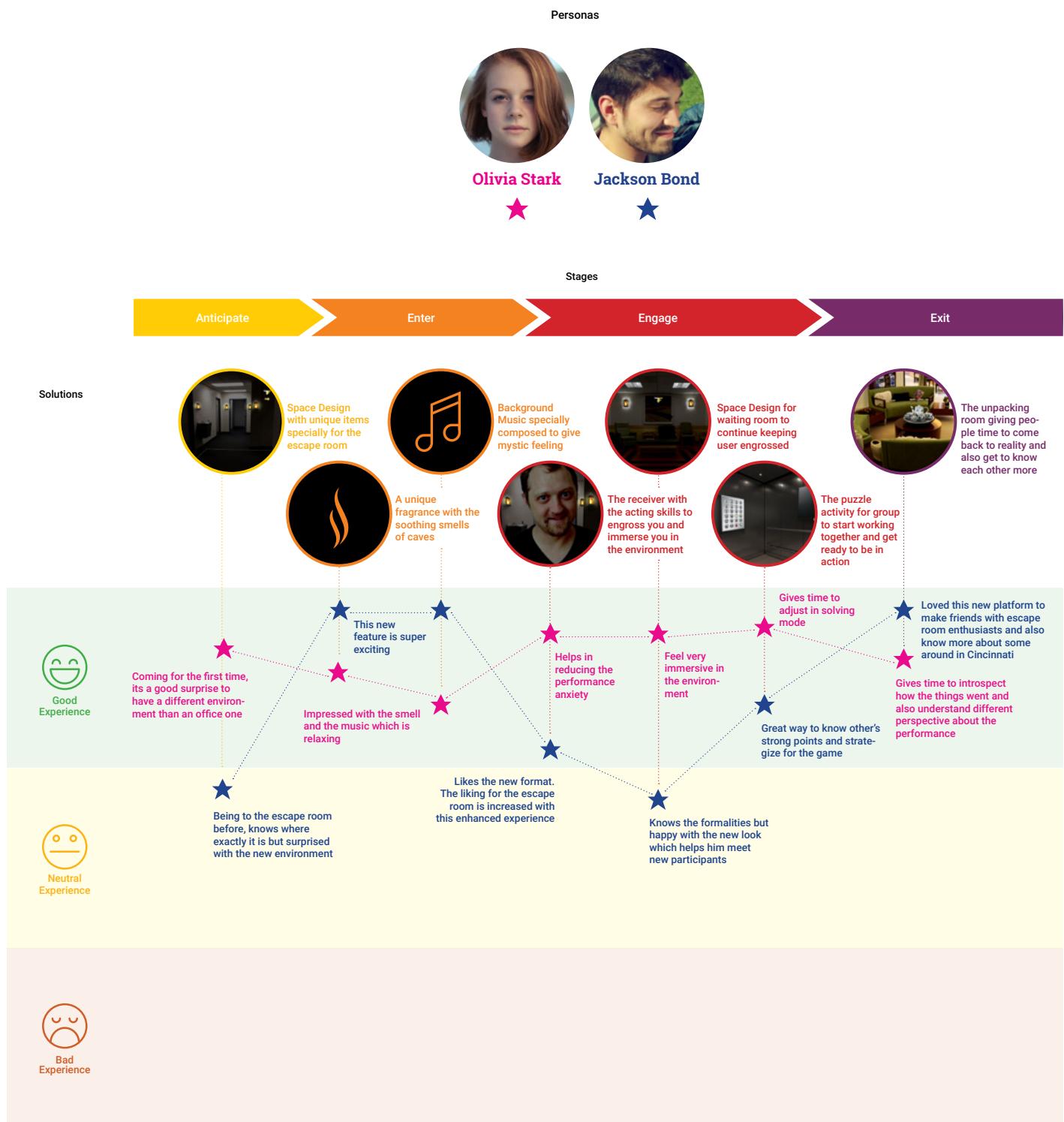
The players in a space such as this can begin to relax; their adrenaline high now almost entirely gone. They sip their coffee or tea while recounting the puzzles they are proud of solving alone or together, ones they are frustrated at for not understanding, and even banter with a bit of blame to throw around. Keeping the group together, however, encourages all exchange to stay positive and the time they get to bask in the afterglow allows their minds to return to an introspective state for the inevitable return to reality.

The exit space has a lot of options for how it handles exiting participants, but the highest value to cost ratio can be achieved by simply providing a comfortable space to mingle for a short time before leaving the premises. Whether using some of the solutions mentioned above or just having a non-thematic quiet space free from new customers, we consider this an essential component to ending such an intense, and potentially failed from the player's perspective, experience on a positive note.



The Mock-Up of Unpacking room with all the features discussed in the article above.

## Experience map with Design Solutions



# Conclusions and Implications

This project was learning from the Esquire Theatre Affordance to redesign the Cincinnati Escape Room experiences. The Esquire Theatre provided its users a special design experience to escape from reality, to unwind and to relax. The Esquire Theatre also builds a strong tie with Mariemont Theatre, Eastgate Brew & View, and Kenwood Theatre to provide their users explore more spaces. We utilized Kenneth Burke's Dramatism Theory (1945, 1950, 1968) to pay special attentions on (1) act (the act by the staff of the Cincinnati Escape Room) (2) agent (the staff) (3) agency (stories and performances that the staff tells the users), (4) The scene (the entering and exit space design including the lights, smell, touch, interaction, etc.) and (5) purpose (to make a better user experience for the Cincinnati Escape Room).

An escape room is a part game, part theater, part team-building exercise that is getting popular around the world. Most games cost \$25 to \$30 per person for a one-hour game,

and typically allow 10 to 12 players at a time (French & Shaw, 2015). In 2007, the first escape room was opened in Japan. After the idea spread to China, Taiwan and other parts of Asia, the first escape room opened in the United States in 2012 (Cheng, 2014). David Hochman (2016) suggests new locations, bigger locations and turning an escape room into a franchise is how to grow the escape room business. A recent news report mentioned that a national chain of mall-based escape rooms believes malls are the perfect locations for escape rooms to thrive (Verdon, 2017). In our case, we learned from the Esquire Theatre and suggest the Cincinnati Escape Room could work with other escape rooms in Cincinnati area to build a franchise-like businesses model. Users could review other escape rooms in Cincinnati area at the newly designed exit area. And, if they wish, they can book the next escape room experience at the room before leaving the Cincinnati Escape Room. Our experience design solution could not only apply to Cincinnati Escape Room but also to other escape rooms.

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