

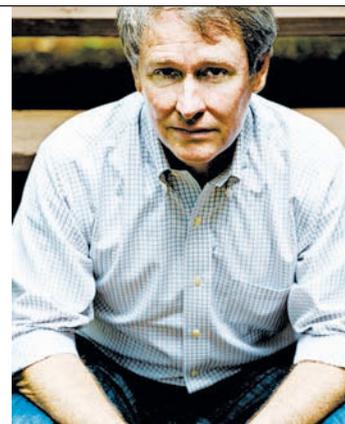
FICTION IN THIS WEEK'S BOOKLET

FALLING

BENJAMIN PERCY

THE SUTTON PIE SAFE

PINCKNEY BENEDICT



Ben Fountain
on the
pummeling
rhythm of
"Billy Lynn"

THE JOURNAL

PRINTERS

**MOLLY
RINGWALD**

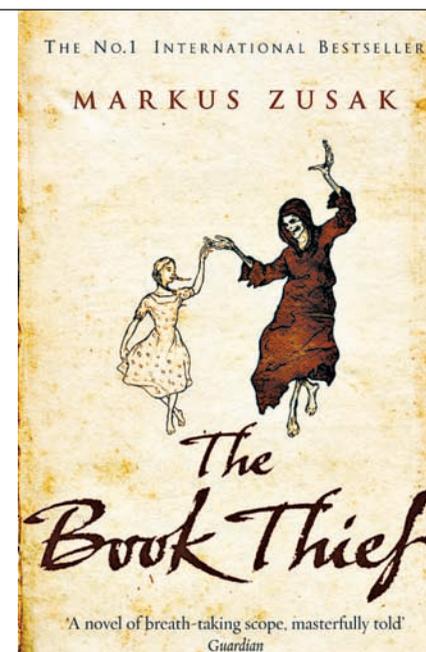
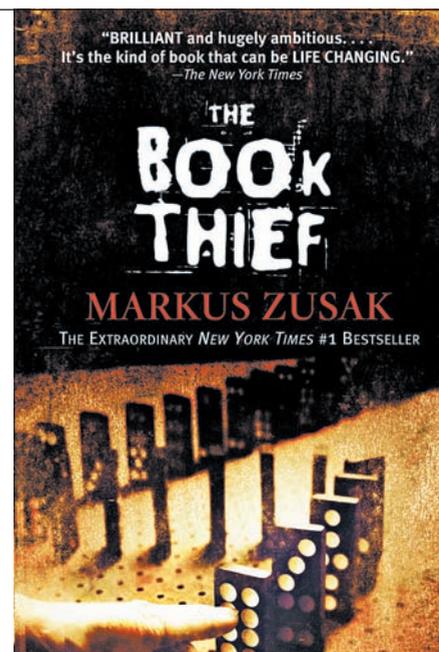
**TEEN ICON
TURNED
NOVELIST**

**GORE
VIDAL'S
BOOKS**



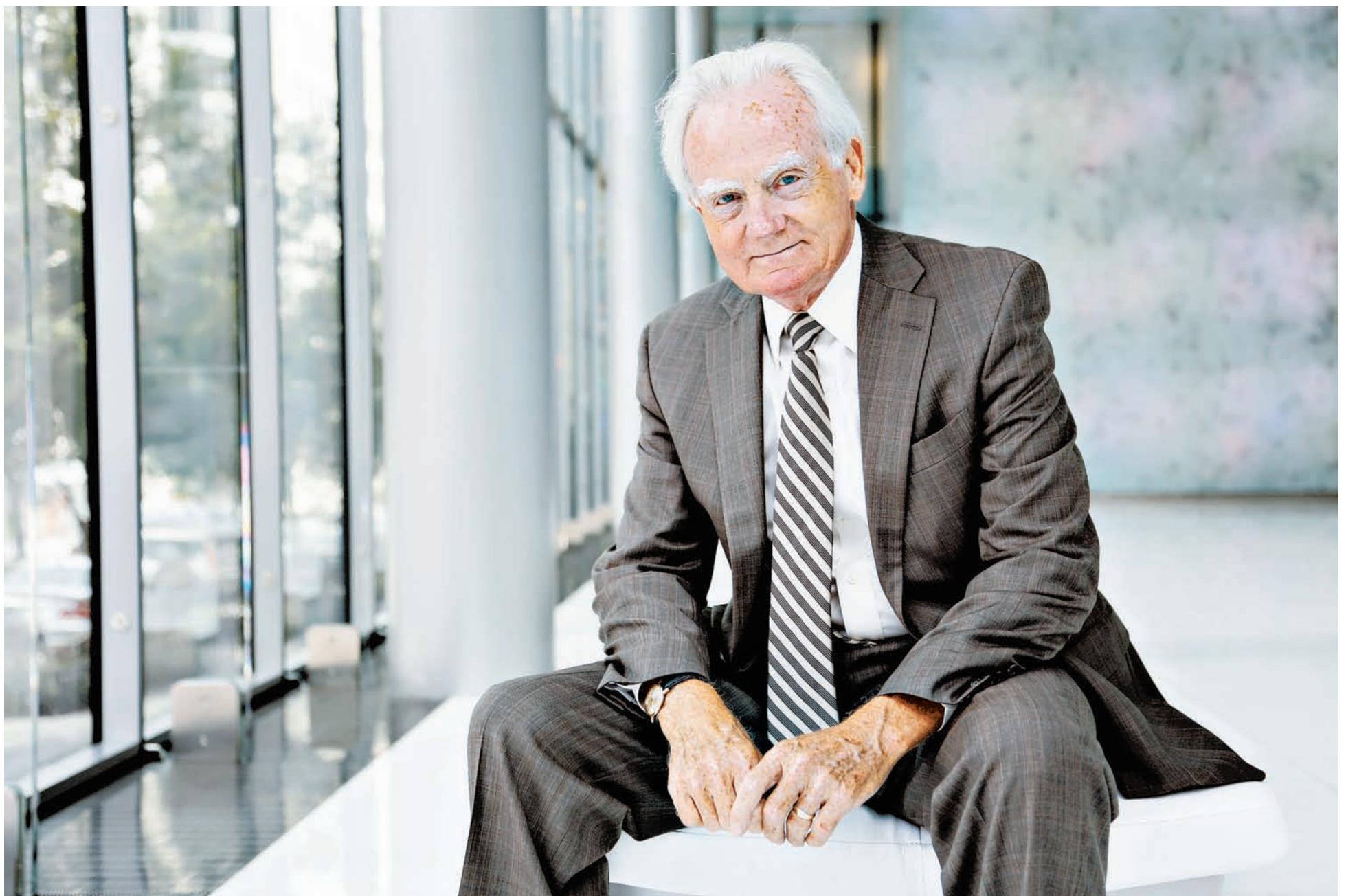
ROW
Chicago Tribune
AUGUST 12,
2012

U.S. vs. U.K.
BOOK JACKETS ON DISPLAY



THE SLOPPY VULGARITY OF THE A-WORD

**DREAMING UP THE
AMERICAN WRITERS MUSEUM**



Jonathan Ernst/Photo for the Tribune

Inventing a literary museum

The American Writers Museum unveils a concept plan for a 60,000-square-foot space in Chicago

BY HEIDI STEVENS

Growing up in Ireland, Malcolm O'Hagan regarded Chicago with a sense of wonder.

"Chicago always seemed like a magical place," O'Hagan says. "I saw it as the real heart and soul and grit of America."

Today, O'Hagan is channeling his urban affection into a bold, multi-million dollar plan to turn the city into the home of a first-of-its-kind American Writers Museum, a destination to both celebrate American writers and their profound influence on our culture and to educate visitors about the history and future of the written word.

"I often visited the Dublin Writers Museum, and I came back from a trip once and wondered, 'Where is the American counterpart?'" says O'Hagan, who serves as chairman of the American Writer Museum Foundation's board of

directors and executive planning team. "The United States has lots of art galleries and history museums and wonderful symphonies, but there is no writers museum."

That is likely to change, thanks to a team of close to 50 scholars, designers, researchers, educators, publishers and city officials working to craft a plan and secure funding for such an institution.

"I imagine it as a place to see literature in all its dimensions and to nurture those of us who love everything about reading and writing," says Donna Seaman, senior editor at Booklist, who sits on the museum's literary advisory council (and who contributes reviews to *Printers Row Journal*). "From quills to iPads — whatever the vessel. It's the language and the insights that make the stories and poems and writing so enduring."

The foundation, with grant money from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Stead Family

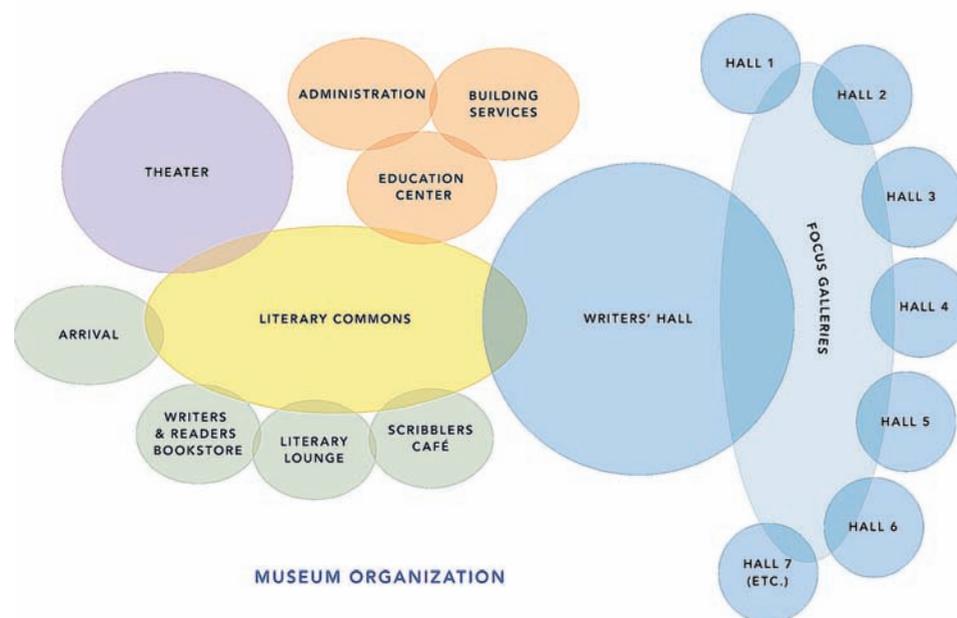
Foundation, executed a just-released 28-page concept plan that lays out a vision for the museum's footprint and mission, even as it emphasizes the need for such an institution.

"Our writers have recorded our history, imagined our lives, entertained us and explained us to ourselves, continuously helping to shape and enrich not only our sense of ourselves individually but also our shared understanding of who we are as a nation," reads the introduction. "The American Writers Museum is both an idea and a place. It will be a vibrant, experiential center dedicated to the explication and exploration of American writers and their works, and it will be a hub for national discourse on writers and writing."

As they conceptualized the plan, designers, led by Andrew Anway of Boston's Amaze Design, considered Chicago, New York and Boston as possible homes for the museum.

The concept

This diagram depicts the visitor experience as envisioned in the American Writers Museum's Concept Plan. The plan calls for a Writers' Hall, or main gallery, surrounded by focus galleries designed to accommodate changing exhibitions.



“Our goal is to have it in Chicago,” says O’Hagan. “It’s a large city with a rich literary tradition, a destination city, supportive of culture and the arts. And Chicago has the added benefit of being central.”

The proposal calls for a 60,000-square-foot building that will unfold in three phases, the first 20,000 square feet of which would open in 2015. A specific location within the city has not been selected.

“That’s a decision that’s going to involve so many factors,” says Reginald Gibbons, a professor of English, Spanish and Portuguese at Northwestern University who serves on the museum’s national advisory council. “One important one is access to people that just walk in. My absolute dream would be within a few blocks of Millennium Park in some repurposed, really beautiful space.”

Gibbons envisions satellite opportunities for the city’s neighborhoods, universities and elementary and secondary schools.

“Every level of reader is going to be welcomed into the physical and virtual space,” Gibbons says. “It’s easy to imagine how we could create programming that would go into the branch libraries and schools and really change the way reading and writing is seen in the communities as having a social value and being a part of arts education.”

The concept plan maps out a museum organized around a Writers’ Hall, which will feature vignettes themed to topics and eras; a Literary Commons for group lectures and presentations; a theater for films, readings, panel discussions, dramatic performances and other programming; Focus Galleries for rotating exhibits on everything from banned books to children’s literature; and a number of social spaces, including a bookstore, lounge and cafe.

“One of the things Andy Anway explained is that you don’t design for what you can do, you imagine what you’ll be able to do five years from now and design toward that,” says Gibbons. “You can imagine a room with some comfortable chairs and screens and you sit down and say, ‘Who were Hemingway’s friends?’ And on screen there appears a kind of solar system with Hemingway in the center and all around him are circles with people in them — bullfighters, other writers, the wives. You just follow this intercon-

nected web of information wherever you wish — maybe brief readings of his passages or digitized manuscripts.”

O’Hagan and other members of the museum foundation’s executive staff are deeply entrenched in fundraising and are working closely with members of Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s staff, specifically his chief of policy and strategic planning, David Spielfogel, and cultural commissioner, Michelle Boone. Boone is excited about the idea of an American Writers Museum, said Cultural Affairs spokeswoman Cindy Gatzliolis, whose department recently released a new Chicago Cultural Plan.

“It’s perfect timing to keep literature part of the ongoing conversation and remind everyone that literature is one of the arts,” says Seaman. “When you talk about culture, you should talk about writing and reading. They’re so essential as the foundation of every other creative endeavor. Stories have been a huge motivating factor for American culture in all of its forms, just as writers are inspired by all the other arts.

“There’s a tremendous connection among all our cultural endeavors in Chicago and the country as a whole.”

Indeed, the American Writers Museum website (americanwritersmuseum.org) includes an enthusiastic quote from the mayor himself among its testimonials, which reads:

“I enthusiastically support the efforts to place a national writers museum in Chicago. Such a museum will complement the rich offerings of the City’s theaters, museums, libraries and musical activities and adds significantly to Chicago’s vitality.”

But the museum is still a concept at this point.

“It would be presumptuous to say it’s a reality,” says O’Hagan. “With a project like this you encounter all sorts of obstacles along the way. But we have the support of the mayor and if the financiers in Chicago come forward, it will become a reality. I can’t tell you exactly when and I can’t tell you the ultimate form, but I am sure it will come to pass.”

Heidi Stevens is a Tribune lifestyle reporter. Tribune reporter Heather Gillers also contributed to this story.

Friends in high places

The American Writers Museum website (americanwritersmuseum.org) features testimonials from a host of influential Chicagoans. Here is a smattering:

“Following a visit to Chicago in the spring of 1919, William Carlos Williams wrote Harriet Monroe, founder of Poetry magazine: ‘I cannot say that I shall ever recover from that rain sodden but vicariously sunshiney week. It was as if, or rather it was actually — I had never in my life before had an opportunity to be just a poet, the one thing I want to be.’ Chicago has always been a city of opportunity for artists and entrepreneurs alike; I can imagine no more welcome neighbor to Chicago’s world-class cultural organizations than the American Writers Museum.”

— John Barr, president of The Poetry Foundation

“Chicago has long been a writer’s town. The grit, pulse, and history of the city have inspired some of our nation’s greatest writers. A permanent American Writers Museum will have a natural home in Chicago. I am thrilled by the prospect and encourage its development.”

— James Cuno, president and director of the Art Institute of Chicago

“Here is a promise to create a museum in Chicago that will stimulate our young people to read, imagine, and write. Using interactive digital media, The American Writers Museum will bring to life the captivating stories of our great writers and explore their influence on our nation. Chicago, where 80 years ago the Four Illustrated American Books of the Lakeside Press helped shape the American book market of the last century, will now become the place for unleashing the power of the written word in the digital world.”

— James R. Donnelley, chairman of the Chicago Public Library Foundation

“Mark Twain believed in Chicago and once quipped: ‘That astonishing Chicago — a city where they are always rubbing the lamp, and fetching up the genii, and contriving and achieving new impossibilities.’ Chicago, home to a rich literary tradition of the greatest writers of our time including Carl Sandburg, Saul Bellow, Studs Terkel, Gwendolyn Brooks and Nelson Algren (not to mention my favorite poet, Lisel Mueller) is indeed an astonishing city that can and does achieve Mark Twain’s new impossibilities. I am most pleased to support the establishment of The American Writer’s Museum here in Chicago.”

— Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, president of DePaul University

“Chicago, my home and birthplace, nurtured many of America’s greatest writers of the past: Dreiser, Hemingway, Farrell, Sandburg, Algren, Bellow, Brooks and Terkel, to name a few. With so much of America’s literary heritage rooted here, it would be an ideal site for the American Writers Museum.”

— Scott Turow, author of “Presumed Innocent”