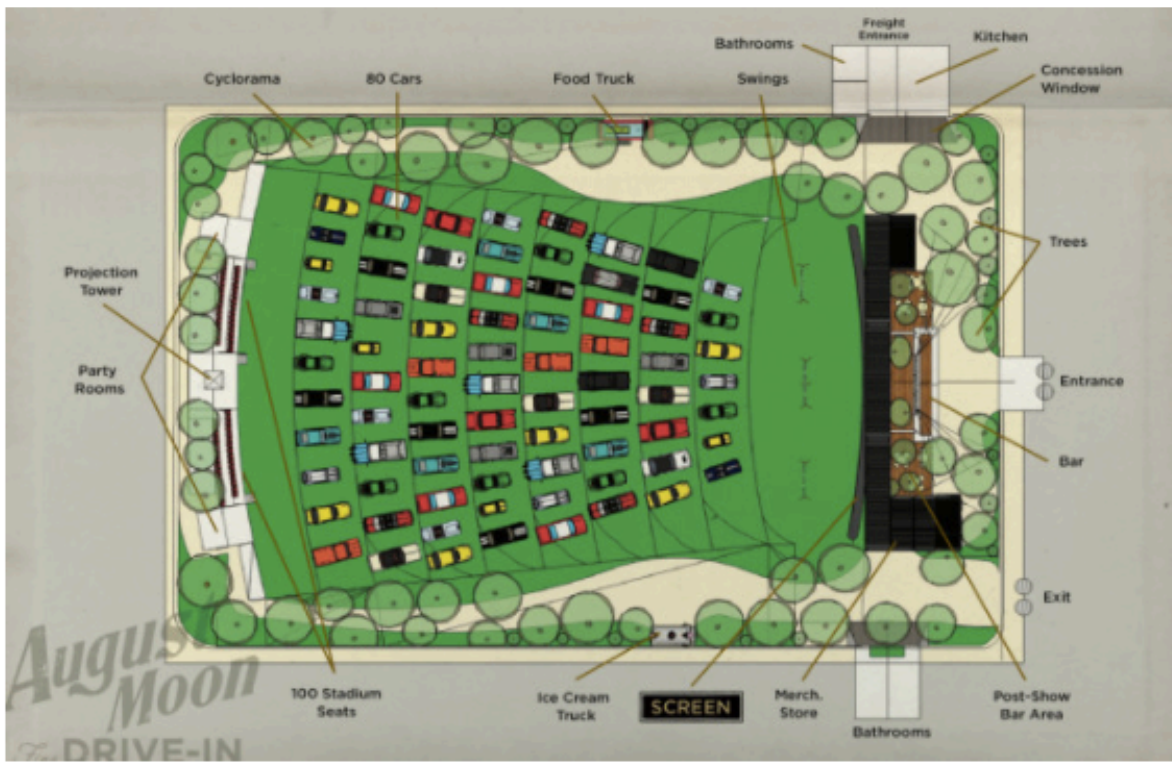


03.07.17 | 3:06 PM

This immersive theater artist is recreating a massive 1960s drive-in in the middle of Nashville

Drive-in movies may feel like part of a bygone era, but that doesn't mean you can't recreate an indoor version of one. All you need is a giant movie screen, 50 classic cars, some full-sized trees, grass, gravel pathways, and a 40,000-square-foot air-supported dome. Those are some of the ingredients going into "August Moon Drive-In," an immersive entertainment project from producer Michael Counts—who is known for such immersive attractions as "The Walking Dead Experience." For this one, **Counts wants to give visitors the full experience of an American drive-in movie, circa 1965, down to every last detail**—including the comfort food and fireflies. He's enlisted the help of theatrical artists and park designers to create the project in downtown Nashville. It doesn't open until the second quarter of next year, but we got a look at some early specs.





Photos: August Moon Drive-In —CZ



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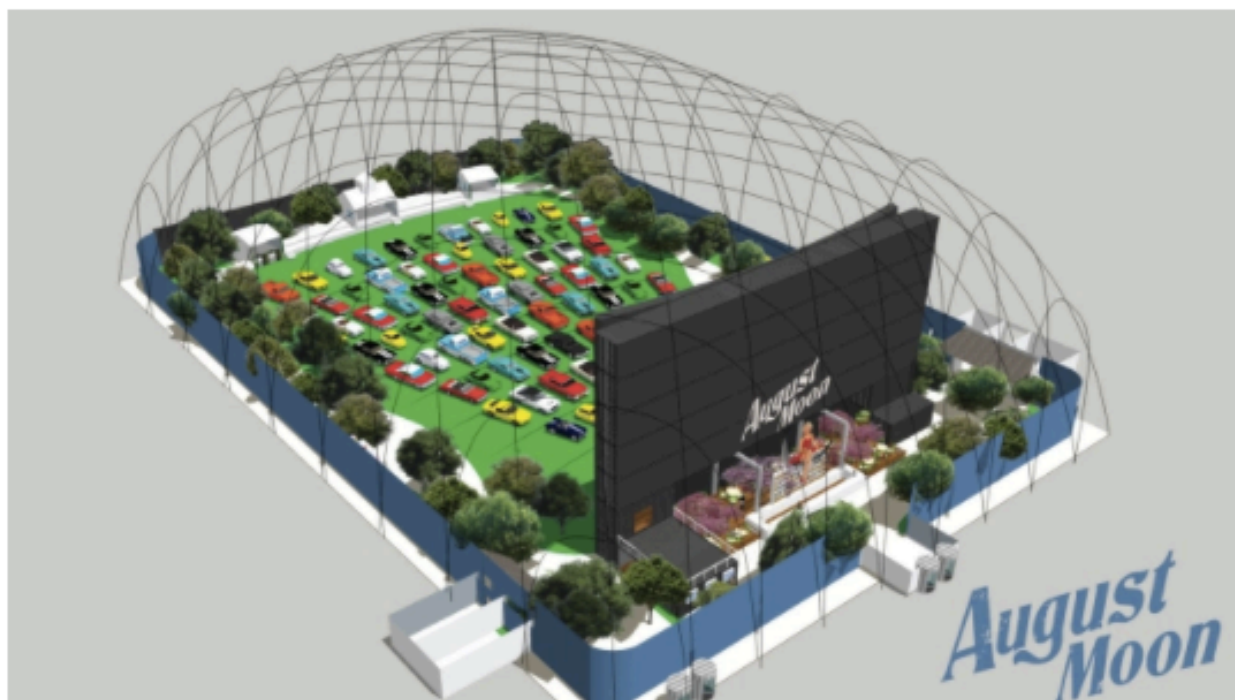
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Dine-In Cinema Gets Immersive: Indoor Drive-In to Open in Nashville



Gordon Cox
Legit Editor
@GCoxVariety



FEBRUARY 6, 2017 | 06:00AM PT

COURTESY OF PROJECT 13 AND AMDI

As cinema chains explore new ways to expand and eventize the moviegoing experience, a new venture will look to the past, creating a massive indoor replica of a 1960s American drive-in theater that will open in [Nashville](#) next year.

Called the [August Moon Drive-In](#), the attraction takes a page from upscale dine-in exhibitors like [Alamo Drafthouse](#) as well as from [immersive theater events](#) like "Sleep No More." The \$10 million project aims to conjure a summer night in the sixties under a 40,000-square-foot, air-supported dome, complete with simulated starry sky, seating in modified classic cars and food service (with a full bar) focused on artisanal takes on comfort-food standards like burgers and milkshakes.

August Moon is created and designed by Michael Counts, who got his start as the director of sprawling, immersive theater events in Brooklyn before he moved on to live, interactive projects that have included New York escape room "Paradiso: Chapter 1" and "The Walking Dead Experience." "Essentially we're building a soundstage," he said of what's envisioned as an intricately detailed recreation of an outdoor space with grass, trees, hammocks, fireflies, sunsets and the scent of meadow air. "We're building a set as if you're going to shoot an outdoor scene in a movie, on an indoor stage."

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'The Walking Dead Experience': Behind Its Secret Avant-Garde Theater Credentials

Nashville was chosen for the launch in part because it seemed a good fit for the attraction's classic-Americana vibe. One of Counts' partners on the project, Vector Management's Ken Levitan, has deep ties to the city as the co-owner of several restaurants in the area and the co-founder of the Nashville Wine and Food Festival.

August Moon's screen, touted as the largest non-IMAX movie screen in North America, will show a combination of first-run films and classics in a programming model that resembles the Alamo Drafthouse's. Tricked out with interactive billboard technology, the screen will allow live performers to engage audience members during previews and post-credits sequences.

The entire experience of seeing a movie — including exploration of the space plus food and drink service — is estimated to take about three hours for a 90-minute film, with around 350 guests accommodated at each of the projected 18 screenings per week.

According to Counts, the price of entry is expected to range between \$8 to \$20, depending on the location of the seating, with food and drink to be charged on top of that. The theater will also offer memberships that allow for free entry along with access to concession specials, seating upgrades and other perks. In some instances, members and others will be able to vote on programming choices.

August Moon is currently scheduled to open in Nashville during the second quarter of 2018 at the intersection of James Robertson Parkway and Interstate 24, near the city's Nissan Stadium. Should the attraction prove successful, its developers plan to roll out more iterations both domestically and internationally, with initial interest coming from parties in China and the United Arab Emirates.

Also among Counts and Levitan's partners on August Moon are James Diener (of Freesolo Entertainment and Alignment Artist Capital), talent manager Michael Solomon and financial backer Daniel Frishwasser, with strategic financing and partnerships coordinated by Barron International Group.

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This new drive-in isn't your granddaddy's cinema

Published: Feb 8, 2017 6:06 a.m. ET



Aa

Netflix and consumer flight are forcing film theatres to rethink the movie-going experience



Getty Images

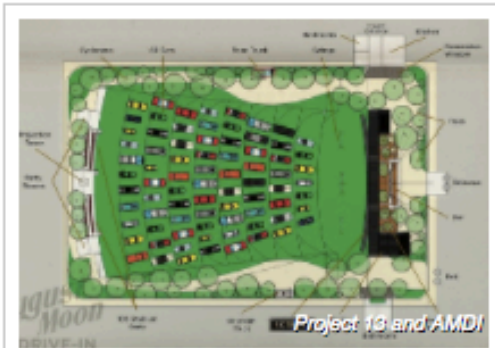
Cinemas are undergoing redesigns in a bid to lure moviegoers back.

By
KRISTIANO
ANG

Talk about going back to the future.

For most people, indulging childhood nostalgia means flipping through photo albums and eating comfort food. Not for Michael Counts, the brains behind the recently announced August Moon Drive-In in Nashville, which is slated to open by mid-2018. Financed by the likes of Nashville music business legend Ken Levitan, August Moon is a \$7.5 million project to recreate a Kennedy-era drive-in cinema under a giant dome spanning 40,000 square feet. Albeit one with a ceiling simulating a starry sky, modified vintage cars as seating, climate control, the largest non-IMAX screen in North America, and a dining menu that's inspired by the classic American fare at Shake Shack **SHAK**, **-1.25%**

"It's born of a desire to transport audiences to the drive-in theatres of heyday," says Counts, the New York director behind the immersive theatre hit "The Walking Dead Experience—Chapter 1." "The movie experience is being reinvented and we're the next step."



A rendering of initial plans for the August Moon drive-in movie theatre

August Moon is the latest in a series of revamps that go beyond the standard improved sound systems and high-def screens that most theaters have done in recent years. AMC Theatres [AMC, -1.12%](#) plans to spend \$600 million to add cushy recliners to about a third of its approximately 5,000 cinemas before 2020. iPic Theaters' recently opened cinema in Manhattan's South Street Seaport neighborhood has [seats that come with buttons to summon servers](#) to satisfy in-movie munchie cravings. And Wynnsong Cinemas in Johnston, Iowa, [completed a six month refurbishment in mid-2016](#) that saw an arcade replaced by a 16-seat bar with craft beer pours.

This is how some theater owners contend with audiences more content to watch movies on their couches than sit in a ratty, popcorn-strewn seat. Americans purchased 1.33 billion film tickets last year, down from 1.42 billion in 2007, data from Nash

Information Services show. At the same time, theater owners are raising prices: Americans paid \$8.42 on average to go to the movies in 2015, up from \$7.89 five years before, according to the National Association of Theatre Owners.

In recreating a nostalgic era though, Counts will have to be careful not to go the way of the dodo. He says that technology allows him to keep the good parts of the experience, while warding off the bad. "A drive-in on a perfect summer night, at just the right temperature with fireflies out doesn't happen all the time," he says. "But we're transporting people in time and space to an idealized version. That's the attraction."

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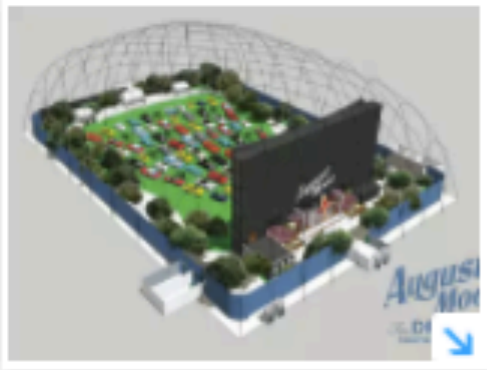
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August Moon indoor 'drive-in' movie theater, bar planned near Nissan Stadium

Getahn Ward, USA TODAY NETWORK – Tennessee

Published 12:24 p.m. CT Feb. 6, 2017 | Updated 9:08 p.m. CT Feb. 6, 2017



(Photo: Courtesy of Project 13 and AMDI)

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A drive-in theater that's expected to have the largest non-IMAX movie screen in North America is on the drawing board for an East Nashville parking lot across from Nissan Stadium.

New York-based director and entertainment entrepreneur Michael Counts is behind plans for the August Moon Drive-In, which will also offer American comfort food such as burgers and milkshakes and several full bars.

Counts, who's known for creating immersive entertainment experiences such as "The Walking Dead Experience," is raising money towards the \$10 million project planned for 14 James Robertson Parkway near Interstate 24.

"We think that Nashville is a great location for it and the concept really fits what Nashville represents," he said, citing a 2014 study from personal finance website [WalletHub](#) that branded Nashville the most "American" of U.S. metro areas.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- New York-based designer-director Michael Counts is behind plans for August Moon Drive-In.
- He has a parking lot at 14 James Robertson Parkway under a letter of intent for a ground lease.
- Counts expects the immersive entertainment concept to open in summer of 2018.

manager Ken Levitan is among Counts' investors in August Moon Drive-In, which is targeted for opening by the summer of 2018. Others include music executive and entrepreneur James Diener, talent manager Michael Solomon and Daniel Frishwasser, who has backed theatrical and film productions such as Count's *The Ride*.

"We're really excited about the project," said Levitan, who also owns stakes in local restaurants such as Adele's in the Gulch. "We've raised some of the money and have to finish the raise."

Counts has a letter of intent with property owners Randy and Bill Bailey for a ground lease of the 7.7-acre parking lot.

Plans call for a 40,000 square foot air-supported dome designed like a mini indoor theme park with features to include 50 mid-1960s classic cars to enhance the way people experience movies. There'll also be multiple dining areas; private "tree house" event and party spaces; and a separate lounge that features live music programming before and after the movie along with dozens of trees, grass, gravel pathways and other scenic elements such as a starry sky overhead, fireflies and an August "sailor's moon" just above the tree line.

August Moon Drive-In is expected to operate daily with an initial schedule of 18 showings a week of first-run movies and favorites from all genres that are no longer widely screened. The entry price is expected to range from \$8 to \$20 with seating ranging from stadium seats to tree swings and the highest \$20 cost for watching a movie while sitting in a car.

A membership model will allow people to see any movie without paying admission and will offer other perks such as food and drink specials, seating upgrades and special access. Members and social media followers of August Moon will be able vote on certain titles, enabling the community to choose the programming at selected times.

Reach Getahn Ward at gward@tennessean.com or 615-726-5968 and on Twitter [@getahn](https://twitter.com/getahn).



Vintage cars will be on-site for patrons to sit in and watch movies at August Moon Drive-In. (Photo: Submitted)

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Nashville
artist

Michael Counts (Photo:
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Stars will always twinkle at virtual drive-in cinema



The vast indoor cinema, designed to seem as if it is outdoors, will contain vintage cars parked in rows on a grassy field under a darkening sky

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At various times in the past half-century, Americans have lamented the demise of a local drive-in cinema, blaming its passing on new technology, multiplexes or the steady disintegration of life as they know it.

Michael Counts thinks he knows the real reason that drive-ins failed and how they might be restored across the country. “When it was a perfect night, when the fireflies were out and there was a giant, low sailor’s moon, it was a transformative experience, so compelling and moving,” he said.

But perfect nights were too few to support steady revenues, according to Mr Counts, 46, a New York designer who has worked on “immersive” attractions for the Disney corporation. His solution is to create a perfect August evening artificially, beneath a 40,000 sq ft dome in Nashville, Tennessee.

This spring work is due to begin on this vast indoor cinema, designed to seem as if it is outdoors. From the outside, the August Moon Drive-In will resemble a white dome, rising in the shadow of a local football stadium.

“It will be black on the inside,” he said. On to this black canvas will be projected a setting sun and a warm starry night. “We are building a huge movie set of a drive-in theatre in 1965,” he said. Beneath the dome, before a big screen, vintage cars will be parked in rows on a grassy field.

Patrons, leaving their real cars outside, would walk in and find the artificial sky steadily darkening. “You are walking in at dusk,” Mr Counts said.

“The sun goes down over 45 minutes before the movie comes on. We’ll have fireflies. We’ll have full-sized trees, grass, vintage cars.” Above it all, a sailor’s moon will track across an artificial sky. “The moon you see in August. Low, orange and glowing.”

The cinema will seat 350 and should open next year. Nashville, deemed the most American of US cities in a survey, seemed the ideal place to launch it. “The idea then is to expand it elsewhere,” he said. “People everywhere love vintage cars, burgers and shakes.”





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Indoor trees and fake stars: Planned Nashville attraction isn't your grandpa's drive-in

Feb 6, 2017, 12:31pm CST Updated Feb 8, 2017, 8:58am CST

INDUSTRIES & TAGS: Food & Lifestyle, Commercial Real Estate

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A massive indoor replica of a 1960s American drive-in theater is planned for Nashville's East Bank area.

Called the August Moon Drive-In, the planned \$6.5 million project is set to occupy 40,000 square feet at the intersection of James Robertson Parkway and Interstate 24. It will come complete with a simulated starry sky, seating in classic cars and milkshakes, according to New York-based designer [Michael Counts](#), who created and designed the project.

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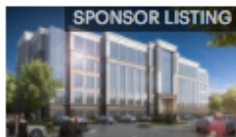
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"The goal is to transport audiences to a perfect summer night at a drive-in movie theater in the 1960s," Counts said. "If you were going to shoot a drive-in theater scene for a movie but for some reason wanted to do it on a soundstage, this is that set."

If successful, the project could act as an [accelerant of the \(very long-awaited\) redevelopment](#) of the East Bank, which is poised to land [a massive mixed-use development](#) and a [Topgolf](#).

Counts said he and his partners, which include Nashville's [Ken Levitan](#), the founder of Vector Management, have signed a letter of intent to lease a 7.7-acre property owned by Bill and [Randy Bailey](#) at the intersection, which is currently home to Main Event Parking. Counts said his group is hoping to wrap up the project's financing this quarter. He aims to open August Moon in 2018.

Counts has been working on the project for three years, with a [2015 article from Broadway World](#) saying the project was set to open in 2016. But Counts said recent momentum in financing and conversations with Metro government make him confident 2018 will be the year August Moon rises.

The Nashville project is meant to be the flagship for the concept, which Counts hopes will eventually have locations in Shanghai, Los Angeles and across the world. Nashville was chosen as the initial home, Counts said, because of the city's classic American culture.

"What really hooked me was when [USA Today did that article](#) that called Nashville the most American American city. ... [We'll put] this classic expression of American culture in this place that is already a great example of classic Americana," Counts said.

Wherever the venue goes after Nashville, Counts said, it will carry Nashville's brand with it.

"The culture of Nashville is in the core of our DNA. ... It's a Nashville brand, in effect," Counts said.

The venue, which is set to feature the largest non-IMAX screen in North America and a full bar, will show new and classic movies, with classic movies costing \$8 to \$20 to view, depending on seating.

"It doesn't need to be \$60 [tickets]. ... We break even at about 30 to 40 percent of our capacity," Counts said. Capacity, he said, is 350 people.

Counts said he believes in this project more than any of his past projects – which include ["Walking Dead"-themed experiences](#) and a [Michael Kors-themed theatrical event](#)– because of the universal love of movies, burgers and milkshakes.

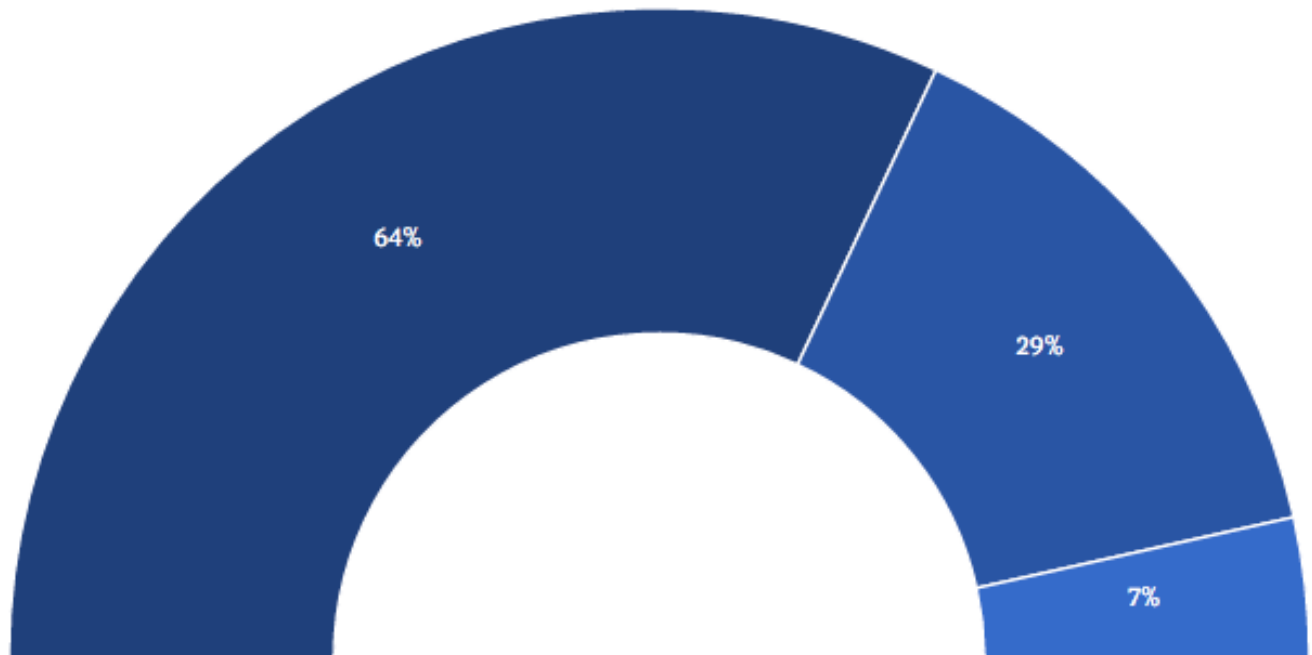
"People everywhere love vintage movies, ... burgers and milkshakes. ... From a business standpoint, I think it's an incredible opportunity, which don't come along all the time," Counts said. "I don't see a reason why there can't be more August Moon drive-ins in many other cities in many other countries in the world."

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Which planned Nashville attraction are you most looking forward to?

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64%
Michael Counts' August Moon Drive-In, which has signed a letter of intent for a location at the intersection of James Robertson Parkway and I-24

29%
Topgolf (on which construction is now underway on the East Bank)

7%
ThrillCorp Inc.'s Polercoaster (which has yet to reveal where it would be located, should it land funding)

Total number of responses: **453**



Home > Movies & TV > Nashville to get fully immersive, indoor replica...

NASHVILLE TO GET FULLY IMMERSIVE, INDOOR REPLICAF OF A 1960S DRIVE-IN CINEMA

By Lulu Chang — February 7, 2017 7:00 AM



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WHY IT MATTERS TO YOU

Sitting in a classic car while watching a movie under a simulated starry sky doesn't sound so bad, and it's exactly what August Moon is planning.

the behemoth of a structure will cost more than \$10 million and will encompass an impressive 40,000 square feet. And while a roof will protect you from the elements, you can still pretend to be one with nature thanks to the air-supported dome that sports a simulated starry sky.

Here's some nostalgia with a dose of modernism for you — a drive-in movie theater in which you (pretend to) drive ... indoors. Meet the [August Moon Drive-In](#), a new moviegoin experience that wants to recreate the past while embracing the future. Set to open next year in Nashville,

You'll drive *to* the August Moon, certainly, but you'll leave your real car outside and hop in a classic iteration once you're within the walls of the August Moon. Classic cars will be modified to serve as seating, and before you get too comfortable, you can grab some food (and drink) service. In another nod to times past, the food served here will focus on staples like burgers and milkshakes, so if you're looking for molecular gastronomy, you'll need to go elsewhere.

More: [Everything we know about the 'Logan' movie so far](#)

A blue rectangular advertisement for Spectrum Internet. The text reads: "Get lightning-fast Internet speeds at an unbeatable price". Below that, "Spectrum Internet" is written in white. The price "\$29.99/mo" is prominently displayed in white, with "for 12 mos when bundled*" in smaller white text below it. The Spectrum logo is in the bottom left, and an orange "SHOP NOW" button is in the bottom right. A small "Restrictions apply*" is written below the button. A play button icon is in the top right corner of the ad.

The real attraction, however, will be the giant movie screen, which is expected to be the largest non-IMAX screen in all of North America. Director and entertainment guru Michael Counts is behind the ambitious project, and though he's based in New York, he says Nashville is the perfect place for the theater.

"We think that Nashville is a great location for it and the concept really fits what Nashville represents," he told [The Tennessean](#), noting that [WalletHub](#) once branded Nashville the most "American" of U.S. metro areas.

When it opens, August Moon is expected to schedule 18 showings a week of first-run movies and classic films that you might not find elsewhere. And ticket prices will be contingent on where you want to sit — you'll be asked to pay anywhere between \$8 and \$20 depending on whether you want to sit in a stadium seat, in a tree swing, or of course, in a car.

Say What?! August Moon, an "Indoor Drive-in Experience" Planned for East Nashville in 2018.

February 6, 2017 • Lesley Lassiter

SEARCH



First reported by [Variety](#), plans have been announced for August Moon, a 40,000 square foot indoor "drive-in" located at 14 James Robertson Pkwy, in what is now Main Event Parking, just east of Interstate 24. The space will feature "full-sized trees, grass, gravel pathways, hammocks, a panoramic starry sky overhead, fireflies, and, of course, a stunning August 'sailor's moon' glowing orange and red, just above the tree line" in a climate-controlled area under an air-supported dome. The projected completion is spring 2018.

Wait. What? Indoor Drive-In?

Before you hyperventilate with concerns over carbon monoxide poisoning, the plan is to leave your car outside and trade for a seat in one of the classic cars set up inside to take you back to the drive-in experience of 1965. Guests will watch movies on the "largest non-IMAX screen in North America" while seated in one of the cars, theater seats, or a general admission-style "lawn" area for blankets and picnics. There will be a variety of dining areas, including "tree houses" for private events as well as a lounge. Entertainment will include first-run and other movies from various genres which may also include live actors for an "interactive" movie experience. According to the press release:

The August Moon Drive-In is conceived as a mini indoor theme park that transports people in space and time to a quintessentially American experience – where that perfect summer night at sunset, where crickets chirp in the distance and the audience breathes in the scent of fresh meadow air, can be repeated with absolute consistency within what is effectively a giant movie set. In addition to being a re-invention of the movie-going experience, August Moon will allow audiences time to explore, play, and dine, and of course, watch their movie.

Dining at August Moon will be “artisanal American comfort food” and popular concession foods as well as several full bars. And though seemingly targeted to tourists, the drive-in will offer a “membership model that allows people to see any movie without paying admission and will offer other perks such as food and drink specials, seating upgrades and special access.” Members will also be able to vote on titles through social media to determine the programming shown. With a planned 18 showings per week, there will be numerous family-friendly movies for matinees and early shows and other genres for later shows.

Why Nashville?

I spoke with Michael Counts, the creative mastermind behind the project who said that Ken Levitan of Vector Management had come on board as a partner and made the suggestion. As it so happened, around the time of early discussions, Nashville had been named the “Most American of American Cities” as a result of a [WalletHub](#) study. What better place for this very American drive-in concept?

So what is an “immersive” theater experience?

Though the project seems ambitious by Nashville standards, Counts is known for his “immersive” theatrical projects, including *The Ride* in Manhattan, *The Walking Dead Experience*, and *PARADISO: Chapter 1*, also in Manhattan. These programs seek to transport the theater-goer to a specific time and place (the other productions have been quite successful). The theater itself will be like a soundstage and envelope the guests into the experience. Along with Levitan (who co-produces the Music City Food + Wine Festival), other partners include behind-the-scenes entertainment heavyweights James Diener, Michael Solomon, Daniel Frishwasser, and Barron International Group, so there’s a lot of talent and faith going into this project.

Though East Nashvillians may rather have a legit multi-screen movie theater, this theater represents a trend toward providing better dining options (see: [The Alamo Drafthouse](#) in Austin) and more user-friendly movie experiences. No doubt any theater experience is going to be better with a good meal and any Pixar movie will be *that* much better with a beer.

Check out the site plan for the theater, complete with swingsets up front, just like the drive-in theater I went to as a kid.



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NewsChannel 5 NETWORK

Indoor Drive-In Named "August Moon" Planned For Nashville

BY: Jesse Knutson

POSTED: 6:48 PM, Feb 6, 2017



An indoor drive-in could be coming to Nashville with the idea to transport moviegoers back to the 1950s and 1960s all while enjoying modern amenities.



NASHVILLE, Tenn. - An indoor drive-in could be coming to Nashville with the idea to transport moviegoers back to the 1950s and 1960s all while enjoying modern amenities.

The project, called "August Moon," was thought up by director, designer, and visual artist Michael Counts, who wanted to bring something forward that could be universally enjoyed.

"People everywhere love cars, especially vintage cars. People everywhere love movies, people everywhere love cheeseburgers, fries, and shakes, and people everywhere love Americana," Counts told News Channel 5 over the phone on Monday.

August Moon is designed to include vintage cars that people can sit in to enjoy drive-in movies, rather than driving their own cars into the facility that is built into a bubble, similar to the Titans' training facility in Metro Center.

The drive-in experience is planned to include all of the things that are great about classic drive-ins, while adding food and beverage areas and even tree houses to watch the movies from, all while eliminating the flaws.

"They were weather sensitive, they were seasonal, logistics of getting all the cars parked at once was a problem," Counts explained.

At August Moon, all of those difficulties will be absent, and due to it being indoors, it will be climate-controlled and mosquito free.

The proposed location is at 14 James Robertson Parkway at the Main Event Parking Lot, and using state-of-the-art technology, when you step into the bubble, you'll be transported to an August night under a full moon at the drive-in.

"The perfect version of it," Counts said. "The perfect sunset, the perfect moonscape, the perfect stars, the perfect array of fireflies, the perfect vintage cars, that's what we're doing."

The project will cost an estimated \$10 million, and the hope is to have the drive-in open by the Spring of 2018.

"Close your eyes and imagine the perfect Summer night in a classic American drive-in movie theatre in 1965, and that's where August Moon is going to take you," Counts said.

Counts is working with multiple investors and business people, including Nashville based Ken Levitan of Vector Management, and talent manager Michael Solomon.

Full funding for the drive-in and approval by the city are still needed before the project can get underway.

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