

TRAVEL

# Logan's Terminal E architect explains the new 'Boston Red' building and fourth-generation airports

The distinctive Terminal E not only looks futuristic from the outside, its architect describes the interior as the next generation in airport design.

By **Christopher Muther** Globe Staff, Updated April 13, 2023, 5:59 a.m.



The new Logan Airport Terminal E is very bright red and sleek as it rises near the old Terminal E. JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

**Y**ou can refer to the color of the soon-to-open Terminal E at Logan Airport as lipstick red, scarlet, vermillion, cardinal, or, perhaps, ruby.

But you'd be wrong.

The color of the striking, sculptural international terminal, which will open in late summer or early fall, is officially called Boston Red. That's according to the man who created the color and holds the patent for it. Architect Luis Vidal, the designer of the Terminal E expansion, went to Switzerland to work in the lab at Monopol Colors to create the very specific shade.

“Boston Red goes from orange to burgundy to red,” Vidal said. “It's very much linked to the roots of Boston because most of Boston's symbols are red, and the shading is also emulating the striking sunsets, which are visible from the terminal. No one else can use it. It's specific to Boston Logan. Full stop, period.”

The red was inspired by visual cues such as fall foliage and the bricks in the Back Bay, South End, and at universities such as Harvard. Even the Red Sox helped inspire Boston Red. The building's color will change — to use the technical term, it is prismatic — depending on how the light hits the aluminum composite panels. The exterior color and the distinctive boomerang-shaped structure are already familiar to recent air travelers (you can also [see it from Google Earth](#)), which was his very strategic goal.

“I think airports have become the cathedrals of the 21st century,” said Vidal, who is based in Madrid. “They are some of the most iconic buildings. They are the front door to a city. You want to give people traveling here something that represents the culture of the city. Boston is extremely open to foreigners. So the space was conceived and designed to be welcoming too.”

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**Luis Vidal, architect of Logan Terminal E**



Terminal E opened in 1974 as the Volpe International Terminal with 12 gates to serve 10 international airlines and 1.5 million passengers annually. Over the years, the number of gates has stayed the same, but 34 airlines now use the terminal. Last year, 6.45 million international passengers flew into Logan.

Massport announced the 320,000-square-foot expansion of Terminal E in 2018 with a budget of \$700 million to \$750 million. The project was initially designed to add seven desperately needed gates, bringing the total to 19. As a result of steep revenue losses during the COVID-19 pandemic, the budget was trimmed to \$575 million (with inflation, the final budget was \$640 million). That meant dropping the number of new gates from seven to four, leaving Terminal E with a total of 16 gates. Also lost in the cuts was a Terminal E parking garage. A spokesperson for Massport said the three additional gates may eventually happen. There is no set timeline, but they have been permitted.

Despite the budget cuts, Vidal, who designed Heathrow's Terminal 2, Pittsburgh International Airport, and an international terminal at Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport in Santiago, sounded confident about the functionality of Terminal E.

“It's all about the passengers' freedom,” he said. “To me, that is the essence of today's terminal design.”



A rendering of the expanded Terminal E at Logan Airport. MASSPORT/HANDOUT

Vidal describes Terminal E as a fourth-generation terminal. The first generation featured small buildings with direct access to aircraft where passengers carried their own luggage. Second-generation terminals introduced baggage handling and basic security screenings.

“Third-generation airports or terminals, in my opinion, became shopping malls from where planes eventually took off,” he said. “There was a certain degree of passenger frustration due to limited options.”



The Interior of Terminal E at Logan Airport, currently under construction. LUIS VIDAL + ARCHITECTS/HANDOUT

He sees the fourth generation of airports as a place where passengers have the power to do what they want to do (within the constraints of an airport, of course). They can shop, they can eat, they can work, or simply seek refuge and relax away from the crowd. Wi-Fi, USB outlets, and electrical outlets are basic necessities. But what's also necessary are places where people can sit comfortably beyond rows of benches at the gates. The terminal will also have four new restaurants, which have yet to be announced.



Spanish architect Luis Vidal designed the expansion of Logan Airport's Terminal E. LUIS VIDAL + ARCHITECTS/HANDOUT

“There are very few fourth-generation terminals in the world,” Vidal said. “I think Boston will become one of the first in the US. It’s quite interesting. If you talk to the city, they think the passenger belongs to them. If you talk to the airport, they think the passenger belongs to them. If you talk to airlines, they think the passenger belongs to them. But the passenger belongs to [themselves].”

This is where Vidal’s recipe for the perfect airport comes into play. In addition to giving passengers options of what to do, he said, the space should be so intuitive that signage is almost unnecessary. The architect needs to address issues that the passenger may never notice.

“So the perfect airport is a place which has the right amount of natural light,” he said. “You don’t want too much, you don’t want too little. You don’t want glare. You don’t want too much shade. It’s also about the ambiance. It’s about the use of color. You don’t want it too noisy, you don’t want it too dull. It’s about the right acoustics. It’s about the

texture. It's about the material. It's about a lot of small values that add up to make an airport terminal a special space.”

Hugh Pearman, a London-based architectural critic and author of “Airports: A Century of Architecture,” said he’s a fan of the hull-like exterior of Terminal E, at least from the photos and renderings he studied. He said it resembles a “lipstick smile” from above.



The bold exterior of Logan's new Terminal E, which is slated to open later this year. LUIS VIDAL + ARCHITECTS/HANDOUT

“It’s quite interesting,” Pearman said. “It’s a nice addition to the cityscape. It avoids a particular cliché of modern airport design, which is to make a terminal in the shape of wings.”

Pearman, who is most familiar with Vidal’s work on Terminal 2 at Heathrow — also known as the Queen’s Terminal — said the architect thrives on designing large spaces. In London, he said, Vidal optimizes the use of light.

“Terminal 2 was a monster improvement at Heathrow,” Pearman said. “If there’s one thing this guy is good at, it’s bringing in natural light.”

At Logan, the distinctive shape of the building is not purely aesthetic. The south-facing facade has 5,500 square feet of photovoltaic glass that turns sunlight into electricity. There are also photovoltaic panels on the roof to create electricity.

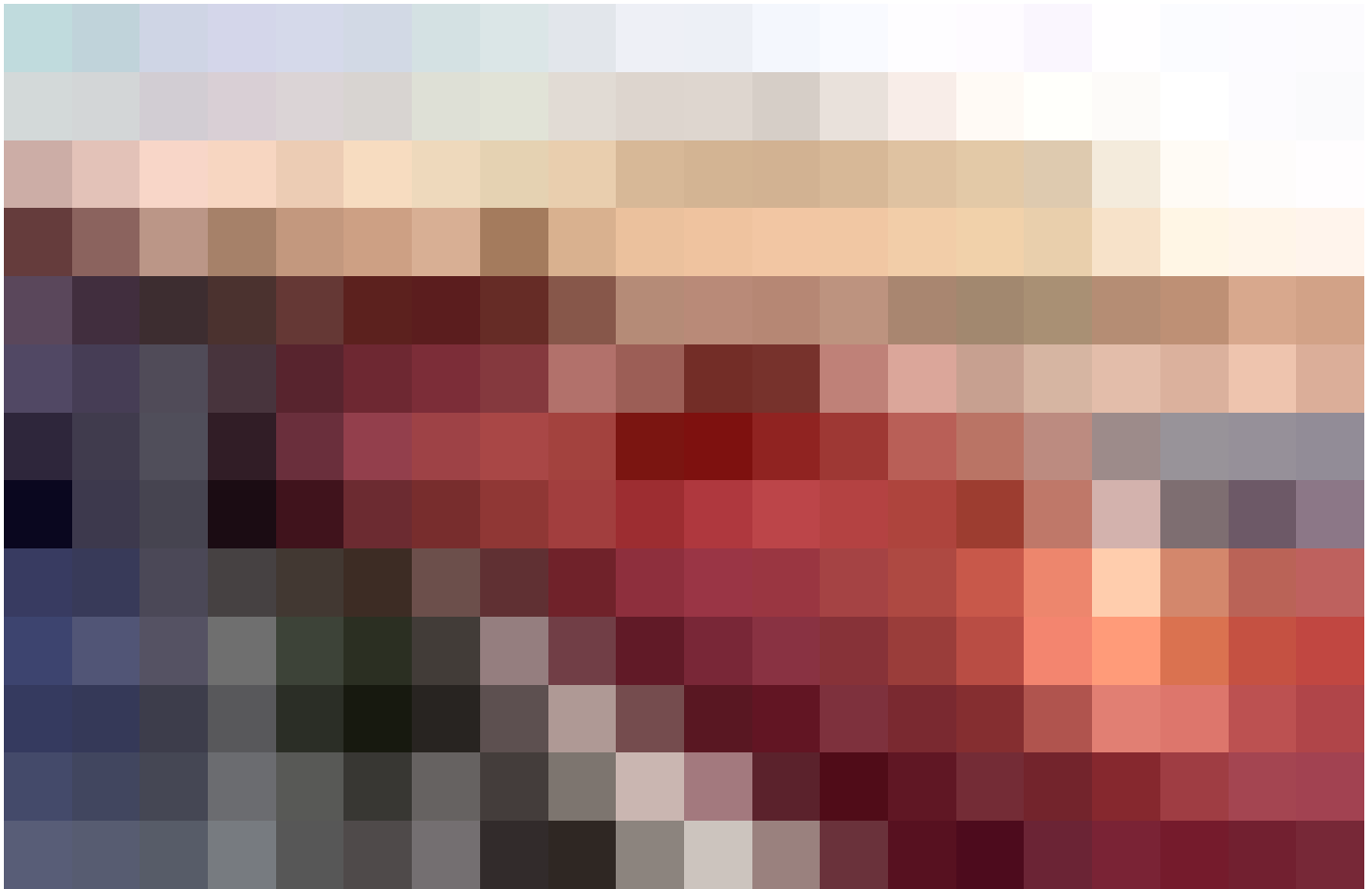
On the opposite side of the terminal, glass automatically self-tints when necessary to reduce the need for air conditioning. Like his work in London, light plays a major role in Boston. According to the firm's project sheet, "Two skylights facing north, composed of two horizontal bands in the shape of eyelashes, protect the interior of the building from direct sunlight." The south of the building opens to provide city views.

Vidal fell hard for those views of the Boston skyline and the sunsets. Midway through construction he bought a home in the city and now splits his time between Madrid and Massachusetts.

"The sunsets that you have in Boston, they're so beautiful," he said. "In a way, they remind me a lot of the sunsets we have in Madrid, they're so special."

Much like Boston Red, they're one of a kind.





A rendering of the completed exterior of Terminal E at Logan Airport. The expansion will add four new gates. MASSPORT/GLOBE STAFF

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