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THE ROYAL ALBERTA MUSEUM RENEWAL PROJECT:

Redesigning a Provincial
museum from the ground up

The Renewal Project is the transformation of the existing Alberta Provincial Museum, which was originally constructed in 1967 to coincide with Canada's centenary celebrations. More than 12 million visitors have visited its galleries. It is a legacy program of the Alberta 2005 Centennial Initiative and in May of that year Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth designated the museum -The Royal Alberta Museum. The new project almost doubles the 212,000 (19,700m²) sq. ft. museum and adds a substantial multi-level wing to the south of the site overlooking the North Saskatchewan River valley. The museum Director Bruce McGillivray has seen this as an opportunity to completely redesign the visitor experiences and bring out on display many more artifacts from its spectacular collections. "The vision of the Royal Alberta Museum is to tell stories of this land and its people, the natural forces that shaped it, and the colossal creatures that once roamed the landscape" says Director Bruce Mc Gillivray.

DESIGN

Last year Reich + Petch Design International was engaged by the Museum to undertake the master exhibition plan and concept design for the visitor experience as well as advise on the strategic plan to undertake this challenging project. The site reflects the story of Alberta itself, embracing aspects of city, park and wilderness. Alberta is a province of rivers; they were the transportation route of the first nations and the early explorers. The building, the site and the contents are interwoven into an engaging visitor experience that moves from the site, to the building, to the exhibitions and collections, out to the river valley and back. The design process was guided by the museum Director Bruce Mc Gillivray, Associate Director of Exhibits Tim Willis and Associate Director of Development Tom Thurston.

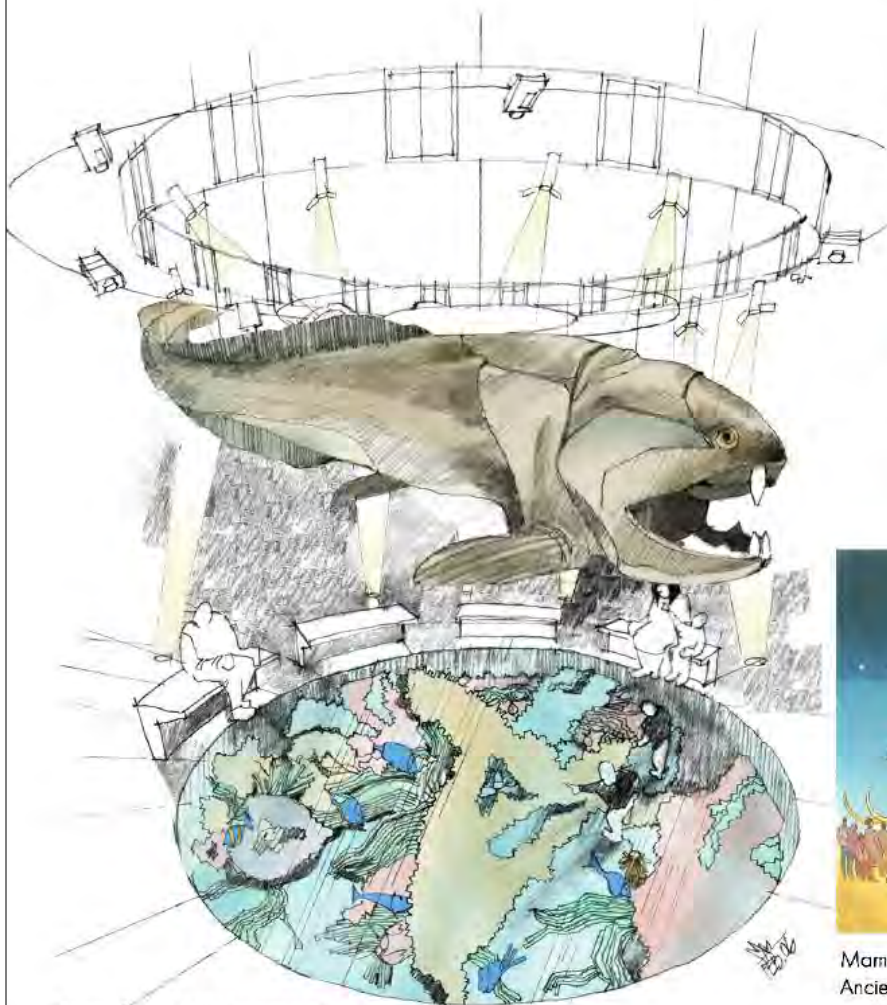
The museum formed seven project teams to represent each of the galleries. Advisory teams were assembled for each of the galleries to provide peer input and expertise. Gallery themes and messages were evaluated at the early stage of the gallery development.

Experience Alberta Object Theatre

The Experience Alberta Object Theatre presents an introductory emotional and artistic experience of stories hidden in Alberta's landscapes. Spectacular vistas of Alberta, projected on a high definition screen, will stretch out in front of the audience. Unique mechanical and media effects will move continuously all around the audience in a ballet of images, sounds, and objects. Interesting artifacts will be raised and lowered into the theater on moving platforms, while smaller projection screens move in and out of the scene, flying on cables from above. The stories in this unique presentation cover topics from the Ice Age to today and emphasize the human experience. First person narration will



The Aboriginal Cultures Gallery Blackfoot Story Setting



Devonian Era Exhibit conveys Alberta underwater 300 million years ago in the Ancient Alberta Gallery

weave each story into the next to create rich portraits of Alberta's history. Weather, climate and landscape will be recurring themes, which connect the experiences. The audience will be surprised as snow begins to fall around them.

Children's Museum

It is seen as a "learning playground" where children (along with adult caregivers) can use their senses to learn about themselves and make connections to the Museum and the world around them. Designed especially for children, provides opportunities to "Explore Alberta" by visiting different places – the

prairies and badlands, a ranch, and the forests of the foothills. Children can discover what it is like on the ground, above the ground, and underground. They will be able to meet people who work on a ranch, coal mine, at an oil rig, and at a dinosaur dig; work in a barn, plant a garden, dress-up, make things, listen to music, dance, hear stories, make and use puppets as well as change the sky from day to night and discover changes in the weather and the seasons.

Ancient Alberta Gallery

A stunning array of ice-age mammals confronts visitors as they enter this space. These animals from the Pleistocene period

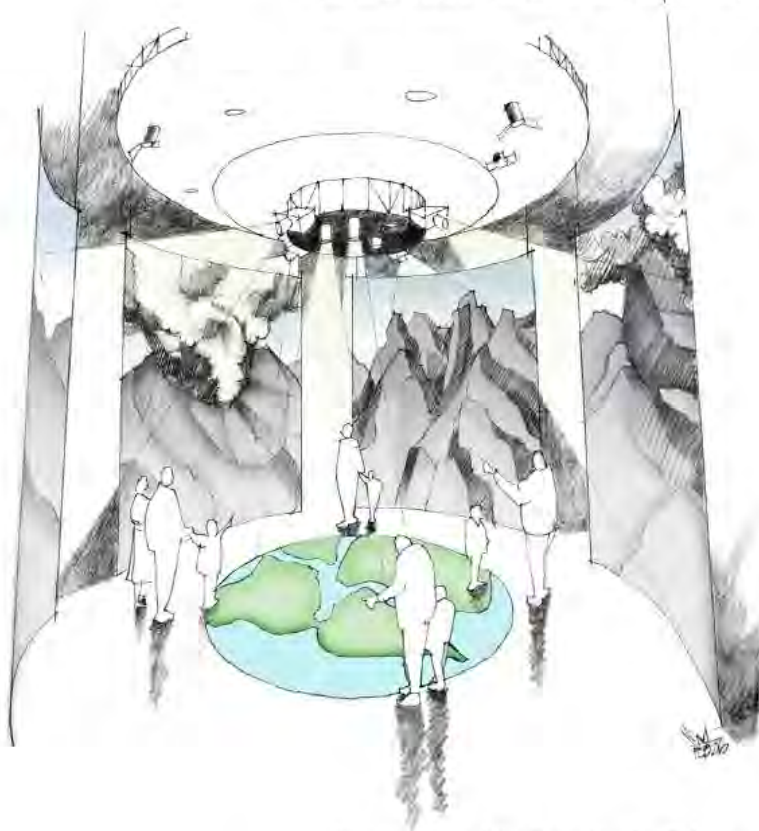


Mammoths and ancient skeletons in the entrance to the Ancient Alberta Gallery

about 50,000 years ago represent one of the five time periods covered in Ancient Alberta. Other parts of the gallery go back to the time when much of the province was covered with tropical seas, or show the animals and plants that not only lived with the dinosaurs, but also survived the great extinction. Audio-visual immersion experiences and interaction with real specimens allow visitors to see what the landscape was like and what lived there at a particular time and also to understand the processes that allowed such plants and animals to flourish.

Wild Alberta Gallery

Alberta is one of the most resource-rich provinces in Canada and rapid changes are taking place to its natural environment. Visitors will encounter unexpected perspectives on the theme of Alberta's biodiversity. Other areas will introduce visitors to different scales of life in the province, by exploring the astonishing variety of millions of tiny, yet vital organisms, made visible in "Microworld". Visitors will also look out over the valley of the North Saskatchewan River, and



discover the biodiversity in Edmonton's own front yard, and learn how they can help to preserve it. In "Macroworld" they will see and interact with the patterns that nature has spread over the Albertan landscape and will explore the way humans are changing them.

Alberta Archaeology Gallery

Separating this gallery from the Aboriginal Cultures Gallery avoided some of the sensitive issues of connections

of past to present and the mis-portrayal of existing Aboriginal Cultures as dead cultures - and celebrate the living culture and enduring spirit of the first nations. Visitors enter the gallery through a field of hoodoos, unique rock formations where Aboriginal people have created images depicting their life and beliefs. This transition introduces the idea that over the last 10,000 years, people have not only lived in the varied landscapes of Alberta, they have also adapted to them. Within the gallery, visitors can visit spiritual sites where the combination of a spectacular landscape and evocative archaeological remains suggest the powerful meanings that aboriginal people drew from the land.

Aboriginal Cultures Gallery

The Museum holds one of the most spectacular ethnographic collections of Aboriginal cultures in the world. Visitors discover that the diverse Aboriginal cultures in Alberta today are very much a part of contemporary society. Within their own communities, these cultures continue to practice many traditions that have deep historical roots. Over the past several hundred years each of the eight cultural groups has had to deal with challenging experiences. In five quiet spaces within the gallery visitors may listen to stories and contemplate the world from various Aboriginal perspectives. They will also be able to meet Aboriginal artists as they work in the studio.

Alberta History Gallery.

This was by far the most complex gallery to design as even though it is quite large (15,000 sf) it has so much material to choose from. The gallery provides a context for understanding heritage resources, collections and the cultural landscape of Alberta. It also deals with controversial issues told from multiple perspectives. As visitors



Southwest Alberta Biodiversity in the Wild Alberta Exhibit



The Royal Alberta Museum South wing looking South to the internal "Ravine" and entrance to the Alberta Archaeology Gallery

Unifying the visitor experiences

explore this gallery they will encounter many individuals from different kinds of communities throughout Alberta. Locations include a coal-mining town, factory workshop, military base, cities, homesteads, prairies, forests and oil sands. Several people from each of these places will tell their own stories about particular events and circumstances.

An Integrated architectural solution supports the storyline and connects the visitor experiences. A series of strong moves connect the galleries, the site and the collections. The building invites in daylight and carves into the site to create a central ravine exposing the depth and breadth of the Museum. The valley is drawn into the building as the building

DESIGN

itself reaches out to the landscape.

The visitor circulation is an unfolding and intuitive spatial experience – a series of Alberta stories that moves from outside to in and from inside to out. It connects the galleries where the stories enhance the collections and curatorial spaces where the stories are preserved, and out to the gardens and landscape that are in themselves a series of interconnected stories.

The design seeks to open up the Museum, in essence to create a museum without walls. Layers are removed to create transparency and translucency. The visitor is offered views of the back of house functions and encouraged to explore and understand the role of the Museum in collecting, preserving and researching Alberta's human and natural history.

When all phases of Project Renewal are complete, the experience of the grounds, the architecture and the visitor experiences will be compelling, enduring and entirely Albertan ■



The New Museum entrance looking North to 102nd Avenue

The New Building built into the river valley terraces



Tony Reich



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Evaluators: TCI Management Consultants

Muti-Media Theatres: Science North

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Cohos Evamy Architects

Lundholm Associates Architects

Carlyle & Associates, Landscape Architects





Over 25 years, we have evolved our viewpoint about design to create extraordinary moments and opportunities for people to have experiences that change their understanding and perspective of the world they live in.

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