

# MUSEUM D • E • S • I • G • N

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Max-Gerrit von Pein  
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# WORLD MUSEUM LIVERPOOL

## “From the Oceans to the Stars”

One of the U.K.’s national treasures, the World Museum Liverpool, reopened to the public in the spring of this year after extensive renovations. The natural and cultural history museum located in Liverpool acquired its globally significant collections from the days when the city was a thriving shipping hub for the British Empire and returning merchants brought back fascinating finds from their global voyages.

Part of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, the newly renamed World Museum Liverpool occupies a neo-classical building, formerly known as the Liverpool Museum. The museum markets itself as covering subjects from “the Oceans to the Stars”. Featuring more than one million objects and artifacts, the museum includes the first aquarium in the United Kingdom, through natural history galleries to world cultures, fine art and archaeological galleries to an astronomy gallery.

Coincidentally, Liverpool, a city renowned for the largest number of neo-classical structures in Europe is undergoing a similar renaissance and has been awarded the Cultural Capital status of Europe for 2008. The massive £35 million project has doubled the size of the museum, providing over 5000 sq. m. of new public facilities. A popular regional attraction since 1853, the renovation was made possible by a £32 million grant from the UK Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the largest grant ever awarded to a museum project.







“Since it re-opened, visitors have found the new World Museum Liverpool awesome and exciting”, said John Millard, keeper of the World Museum Liverpool which has exhibits from millions of years ago, around the world and into space, including one of the most extensive insect collections in the world. Jasper Jacob and Associates, a London-based exhibition design firm with Reich + Petch Design International in Toronto were awarded the contract to design the galleries, public spaces and wayfinding for the project. Reich + Petch undertook the design of the aquarium, bug house, four world cultures galleries, graphics and wayfinding. This also involved working closely with the Edinburgh architectural firm of Law, Dunbar and Nasmith and their consulting engineering team. It involved close integration of the architecture and exhibit elements to ensure that visitor flow, life safety and wayfinding was not compromised.

The restoration of the building required that the fabric and historical features of the Edwardian Liverpool Museum were respected and that the exhibit “architecture” finishes and colours were in sympathy with the restored interiors. Part of this restoration and rejuvenation involved the complete reorganization of the building to create a seven-storey atrium, with a curved glass roof, within an existing open internal courtyard and a new principal entrance off Lower George Street. Project architect Dermot Patterson, of LDN Architects said, “LDN enjoyed a very positive dialogue with Reich + Petch, which enriched the architectural design beyond what would have been possible working in isolation.”

Discovery centers were created for both natural and cultural history floors to allow visitors to interact with the collections, curators and staff, handle objects and carry out their own explorations and insights. Other highlights of the transformation include a new café, shop and education facilities. One of the most talked about features is the newly reopened Upper Horseshoe Gallery (named after its floor plan shape) containing the new World Cultures Galleries that has not been accessible since being badly damaged in the Blitz of 1941. Striking bridges span the atrium and connect the Clore Natural History Centre and The Weston Discovery Centre to the new circulation spine of the building with its glass elevators and new

Top: Centrepiece war canoe model in Oceania section of World Cultures Gallery.

Middle: King Thebos throne in Asia section of World Cultures Gallery.

Bottom: Contextual Altar in Buddhism Gallery in Asia section of World Cultures Gallery.

stairs. Building on the museum’s slogan “from the oceans to the stars” the design team developed simple graphic key plans of the museum where the aquarium is shown on level 1, natural history galleries on level 2, world cultures on level 4 and astronomy gallery and planetarium on level 5. The designers created a wayfinding system that went beyond pure signage. Large areas of colour and imagery give each level its own distinct identity. Touch screen monitors allow visitors to preview the museum’s offering and highlights, and upbeat pictograms define the museums collections. A special typeface, unique to the museum was developed, and a three dimensional map and a graphic design standards manual was established to allow the museum to implement future additions to the wayfinding.

The Aquarium complex presented an interesting challenge, since unlike most contemporary aquaria, it is small in size, had a limited budget and required expensive technical back of house support areas. Museum research had shown that it was one of the favorite attractions in the museum and was regarded with great nostalgia and affection by local visitors. The museum mandated that this area should be more interactive, more informative and more dramatic in its presentation than its didactic predecessor.

The Aquarium is divided into an immersive viewing area of live tanks and environments and a more active lab-like study area with video connections to back of house feeding and research areas. The live areas transport visitors to a tropical coral reef and South American river with underwater biomes of coastal, drop-off and everglades, comparing them to more temperate waters and rocky coastlines with their indigenous species. In the nearby study area, the local Merseyside estuarine habitats can be explored in special viewing tanks. In the center of the area is a Living Laboratory with a demonstration area featuring touch tanks and a video screen for presentations.

On entering The Bug House visitors are in for a surprise. A giant animatronic fly sits in front of a huge drainpipe, thus reducing visitors to insect size. The gallery displays an amazing variety of exotic insects both live and mounted; the critters are super-scaled, as well as being placed in



- Top: Americas, Northwest Coast section of Americas World Cultures Gallery with Totem pole.
- Middle: Japanese Samurai warriors in Asia section of World Culture Gallery.
- Bottom: Stylized room setting in the Bug House gallery relates to feeding in the “kitchen” of the house.



Spider animatronic with gobo-produced floor pattern in Bug House Gallery



Rendering of Bug House Gallery entrance.

a familiar residential context. The effect of this context makes them even more fascinating than usual. Bug Stories of reproduction, feeding, insect sounds and habitat are displayed in cartoonish room settings of nursery, kitchen, lounge, garden and shed, giving meaning to the notion of Bug House. A giant animatronic spider spins its web overhead and scarily drops down on an activated visitor-sensor giving another element of surprise. Combining interactive games with live displays was done deliberately to appeal to the younger audience. In the discovery area there are drawers showcasing some of the museum's vast storehouse of insects.

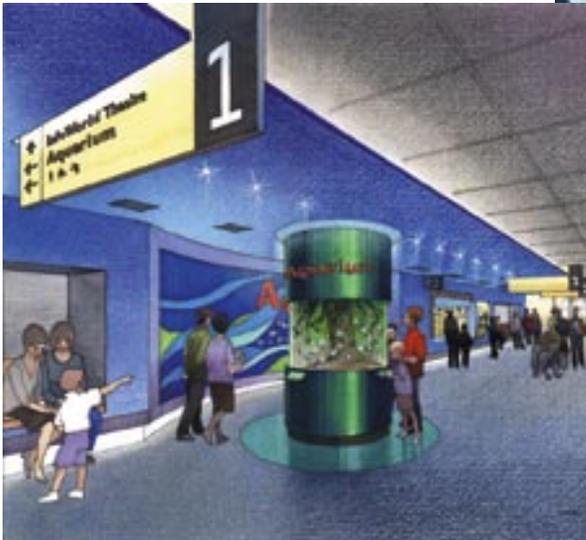
The new World Cultures Galleries is considered one of the " 'jewels' of the museum". "When we started to design the galleries we were in awe of the vast array of spectacular artifacts, many of which were in the same boxes that they were originally transported in" says Stephen Petri, senior designer with Reich + Petch Design International.

Concerns were raised that these treasures not be viewed as items "plundered" from other civilizations, so the more traditional approach to display was taboo. The displays needed to be replaced by a more contemporary and sympathetic approach which embraced the large multi-cultural community of Liverpool and the northwest UK. This conclusion was reached while undertaking community focus groups and the results were carefully evaluated prior

to designing the gallery.

A journey of cultural discovery was employed as the storyline in the World Cultures Galleries. As visitors travel through and view the exotic artifacts, they are shown how perceptions of foreign lands, peoples and cultures contrast with the perceptions of Europeans by their inhabitants. Objects are given primacy in the displays but set in context to give the flavour of their origins and relationship of groupings to related artifacts. Each area is provided with a key exhibit to pace the experience. Exhibit "architecture" is minimized to break down the barriers between the artifacts and the viewer. Lighting is controlled but dramatic, text is purposeful and digestible for the target family audience. By visiting the feature exhibits the visitor with limited time gets the big picture, although there is plenty of information to bring them back.

The horseshoe gallery shape facilitates two entries so visitors can start their journey either in Asia or Africa and an audio-visual introduction sets the mood of the section. Asia begins with its most outstanding feature, the Buddhism Gallery. Here spectacular Tibetan artifacts and Tankas (wall hanging textiles) are installed to suggest a Tibetan prayer hall. The gallery is entered through a representation of the ancient wall of the capital city of Lhasa. Prayer chants



Rendering of Aquarium Complex entrance.

set the mood of the hall as light filters through the overhead lattice. In the shrine precious ornaments are displayed in a traditional setting of rich colours and woods. This area of contemplation has an air of almost religious sanctity in contrast to other areas of the museum.

The Oceania area of The World Cultures Gallery covers artifacts from many islands of the South Pacific, including New Ireland, New Zealand, and New Guinea. Spacious room-sized cases are used to give breathing-room and architectural context to the artifacts.

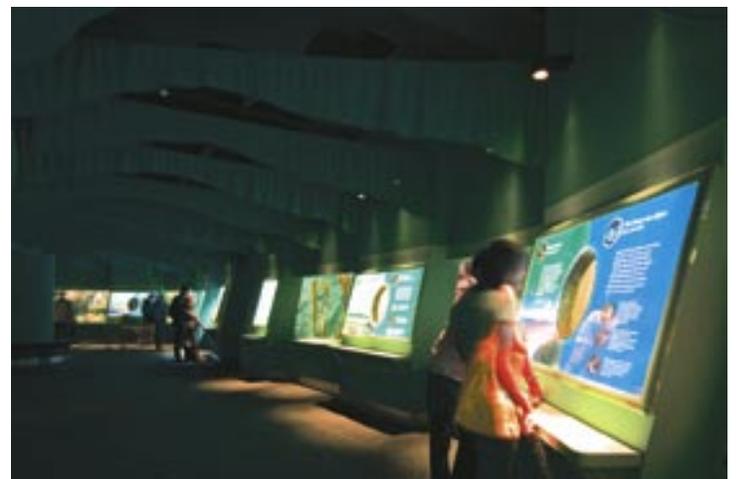
Many objects from Oceania are spectacular in size and constructed of natural materials of wood, bark and straw. Their sensitivity to light and deterioration required very close cooperation with the conservators on the team. A special translucent film 'Lumisty', made in Japan, was used in the cases, which invites viewing at certain angles giving the visitor a secretive 'voyeuristic' viewing experience. The iconic feature of the Oceania exhibit is an enormous, dramatically-lit Maori war canoe from New Zealand.

Separating the Americas area of the World Cultures Exhibit is an area where indigenous artists can perform. As visitors enter the Central Americas, they



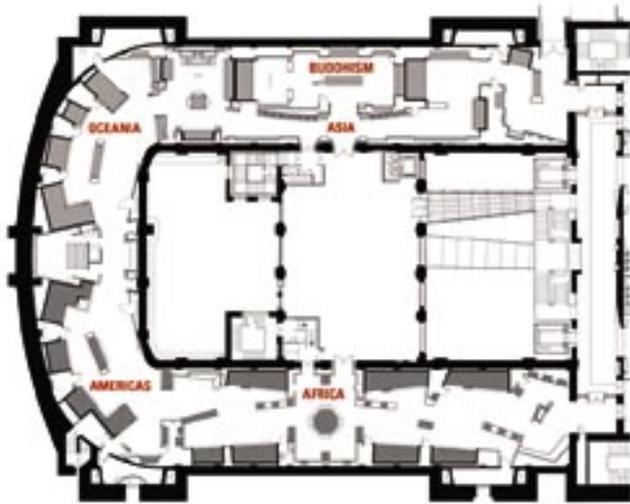
Aquarium Complex showing immersive tanks left and lab area on right.

see the rare and precious Codex Fejervary-Mayer calendar. It portrays the ritual calendar in the shape of a folded book dating back to before 1521. Moving on to Africa visitors are "transported" along the west coast of Africa and inland to past Kingdoms and civilizations. Displays are arranged by country showing the broad panoply of religious beliefs, art, craft and ceremony, as well as evidence of the European interlopers and traders who colonized the areas. Subtle variations of colour, materials, context and representational artifacts denote the individual characteristics of each nation. A Negwomo Post, a very rare Ibibio memorial shrine from Nigeria portrays the chief at the top with his wife, child and slaves below, while the circa 1900 Nkisi Nkondi "power figure" Mangaaka from the Democratic Republic of

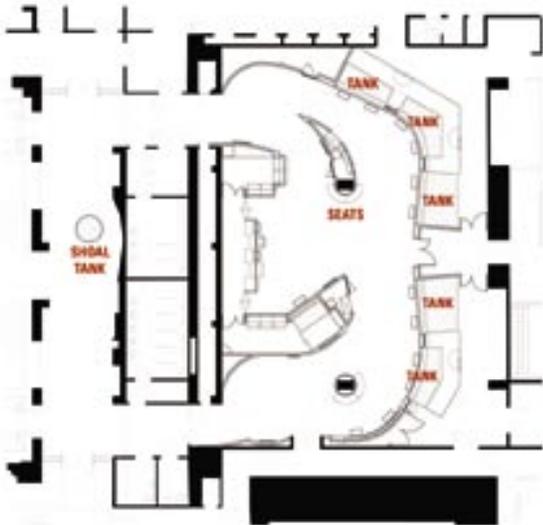


Graphic panels with inset tanks focuses the visitor's attention on specific aquarium topics.

PLANS



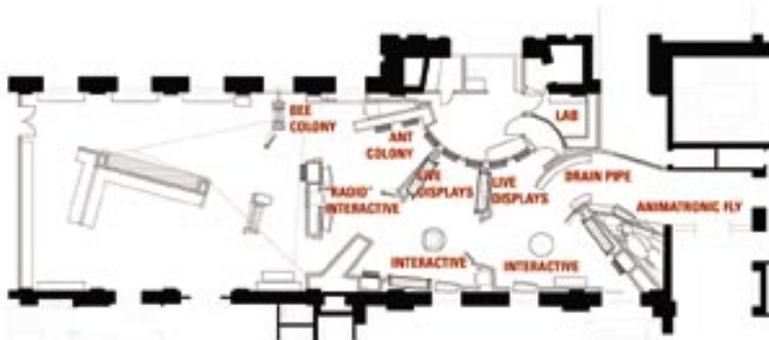
WORLD CULTURE GALLERIES



AQUARIUM GALLERY



Atrium with bridges and way-finding banner.



BUG HOUSE GALLERY



Anthony Reich



*The author Anthony Reich is the founding Principal of Reich and Petch Design International.*

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Congo captures the importance and respect that was given to the leader.

Interestingly enough, visiting Europeans are portrayed in some of the African artifacts, as having very high hats and big noses.

One of the “jewels” of the collections in the center of the Africa area is the display of Benin bronzes, one of the most prized collections in the world. The bronzes are housed in an octagonal case to represent the circular royal palace, which was destroyed by the colonial British in their attempt to subjugate this proud Kingdom. Among the most memorable pieces is a bronze sculpture of the Queen Mother, wearing her highly decorative coral bead headdress. This spectacular bronze cast from Benin City, Nigeria was created in the 16th century. “We were honored to have been part of the design team who gave a new face to this cherished national institution”, comments Anthony Reich, Founding Principal of Reich and Petch Design International.

#### Design Team:

Reich + Petch Design International Team: Tony Reich, Stephen Petri, Adrian Von Ulrich, Heather Chiao, Geoffrey Kumagai, Michael Monka, Leslie Carleton, Patricia Roy

Jasper Jacob and Associates Team: Jasper Jacob, Michael Cameron, Tony De Burgh, Paul Goodenough

Exhibits Team Manager: DBA: Martyn Best

LDN Team: Andrew Wright, Mark Sidgewick, Dermot Patterson, Julie Wilson, Colin Ross

Structural Engineer: Curtins

M&E Engineer: David McAspurn Partnership

Quantity Surveyor: Rex Proctor and Partners, Ian Morrison

Lighting Designers: Speirs and Major Associates, Sutton Vane Associates

Exhibits Fabricator: Silver Knight/ MICE

General Contractor: HBG



Exterior of World Museum Liverpool with new entrance between signage masts.



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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