

The Science Discovery Museum

Acton, Massachusetts

Role: Architect and Museum Planner for New Children's Museum

Program: Interactive children's science exhibits, classrooms, lobby, gift shop, offices, and support areas.

Building Area: 8,200 SF

Status: Opened in 1987

Description: The Science Discovery Museum of Acton, Massachusetts, is a children's participatory science museum. Its imaginative array of participatory science exhibits are housed in a three-story wood frame building that is conceptualized as an imaginary and magical house one might discover in a clearing the woods.

The building design reflects a blend of scientific and Victorian imagery which relates to both the science focus and the Museum and the architecture of the small New England town of Acton. Symbolic themes of electronic circuits and mechanistic joints embellish the building facades, and the decorative elements of both the front and rear of the structure suggest robotic forms. The science imagery of the building is reinforced by the choice of colors that accent the decorative elements. Through the use of wood clapboard siding and the design of the copper-clad tower, connotations of Victorian architecture are evoked that offer a particularly appealing beauty form for the museum's young audience. Inside, the building's plan is arranged within a 12 foot grid. Interior spaces expand out from a tight entry foyer, unfolding into increasingly voluminous and brighter spaces which culminate in a three-story tower court centered at the end of the entry axis. The public stair is engaged with this tower. As visitors ascend the stairway to reach the upper exhibition levels, they experience increasing light levels from the natural light penetrating the tower clerestories. Both science and historic imagery are blended through the formal relationship and character of the rooms, which are appropriately scaled for youngsters, and the design of wall openings and architectural details, which are symbolic of science themes.

The museum's imaginative and appealing exhibits, which deal with earth science, light and color, communication and sound, water, and physics were conceptualized by the museum's Director, Don Verger, with the assistance of Boston exhibit designer Cia Mooney. Although the exhibits were designed to focus on the six to twelve age group, in reality they have an appeal that keep parents and older siblings happily absorbed during a museum visit.



