

Louisiana Art and Science Museum

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Role: Museum Planner & Conceptual Designer for Museum Renovation and Expansion; Collaborated with Exhibit Designers (Ralph Applebaum Associates)

Program: Interactive science and art exhibits, collection storage, theaters, lobby, cafe, gift shop, function space, classrooms, exhibit support, and offices

Building Area: Renovated areas 56,000 sf
Expansion areas 28,000 sf

Status: Awaiting funding

Description: Our work for the Louisiana Art and Science Museum illustrates the fundamental building block in planning that determines the core concept of a new project based on its functionality, appeal and sustainability.

The Louisiana Art and Science Museum (LASM) is housed in a renovated and expanded historic railroad station in Louisiana's capital city of Baton Rouge. The Museum's permanent collection of over 4,000 objects is varied, with holdings in the areas of Louisiana Modern and Contemporary Art, American and European Art, Graphic Arts, Decorative Arts, Photography, Ethnographic Art, Antiquities, Scientific Objects and Memorabilia. The Museum's education and entertainment programs are enhanced by a state-of-the-art planetarium and space theater. Much of the Museum's gallery space is used for high-quality changing exhibitions. LASM is a very popular and well-run institution that is loved by its community.

The Museum occupies a compelling and strategically positioned site along the Mississippi River. Recent renovations to the Old State Capital and the dramatic new Shaw Center gave LASM the opportunity to increase its role as an important riverfront hub for Baton Rouge's cultural corridor. Acting on the desire to enhance its programs and brand, LASM engaged our museum planning services. Ralph Applebaum Associates, a firm specializing in interpretive and exhibit design, joined the project team. Together, we engaged the Museum's key stakeholders in a series of workshops with the goal of seamlessly integrating a new vision for the Museum.

In our Museum planning study, we carefully studied the Museum's program and existing site conditions to devise a concept that would serve as an institution-wide approach to exploring the intersection of art and science. Our initial work focused on their internal space needs.



We also looked at options for strengthening the Entrance Lobby, visually and functionally. This led to a complete reorganization of the interior spaces, as well as a conceptual design for a multi-level lobby/café/gallery expansion. To optimize their riverfront location, we also proposed an elevated promenade/terrace that allowed for views over the adjacent levee and railroad tracks, while maintaining the limited amount of parking below. Outdoor art installations were incorporated into our designs for the promenade/terrace.

The architectural options we investigated reflect VernerJohnson's continuing interest in focused spatial organization and material interface, in this case historic brick and stone juxtaposed with state-of-the-art glass-skin technology. Issues critical to the understanding of museum space design—transparency, opacity and reflectivity—guided our process.

The result is a concept that facilitates the connection between art and science and invites visitor participation, discussion and inquiry. A grand atrium space along the riverfront will be transformed by sunlight and sky colors. The promenade/terrace, with selected public and private views, will maintain connections to the natural and built environment. While deferential to the historic context of the site and city fabric, our bold expression for the building's facade will re-affirm LASM's reputation as the vibrant host of a dynamic, energized cultural destination.

