

Recent and Current **Museum** Projects

Museum at Prairiefire

Overland Park, Kansas

Role: Architect & Museum Planner for New Museum, Lead team of Engineers and Museum Specialists

Client: Merrill Companies, LLC

Program: Changing exhibition gallery, children's discovery room, lobby, cafe, gift shop, function space, classrooms, exhibit support, and offices

Building Area: 41,000 sf

Status: 2014

LEED Silver anticipated

Description: The Museum at Prairiefire is designed as a regional civic hub bringing world-class educational traveling exhibits from the American Museum of Natural History to a community hungry to engage in broader cultural and scientific experiences. At the same time, the architecture of the museum creates an identity for the community by celebrating the rich story of the region.

For this new museum, the goal is to inspire excitement and discovery. The architectural vehicle to do this is drawn from local inspirations. The design concept evokes the imagery of one of the most unique aspects of the Kansas tallgrass prairie: the prairie fire burns.

Rolling stone forms are the backdrop for vibrant 'lines of fire'. Materials dynamically shifting in color and reflection bring these fires to life: multi-colored iridescent stainless steel panels mixed with an innovative use of dichroic glass.

Whereas the stone volumes are backdrop, the fire elements physically engage visitors. The playful, sculptural and colorful design creates an excitement that draws the visitor in.

The interior invitingly opens through from street to wetlands. Within the Great Hall the fire shapes form unique volumetric spaces and shifts in scale, creating countless moments for discovery.

To evoke the ephemeralness of flames, the walls of the 'lines of fire' are designed as thin as possible. Narrow tube columns are spaced 25" apart, encouraging people to stand between them. The lack of apparent structure makes the Great Hall volume float, expand around corners, and dynamically engulf the visitor.





The World Class Bollywood Museum

Film City, Mumbai, India

Role: Design Architect & Museum Planner for New Museum

Program: Interactive history exhibits, theaters, lobby, cafe, gift shop, library, archives, function space, exhibit support, and offices

Building Area: 155,000 sf

Status: Contract Documents Phase

Description: VernerJohnson's design for a new World Class Bollywood Museum at Film City was selected as the winner of an international competition. Brad Nederhoff, the firm's Managing Principal, led the architectural design and coordinated the project team that included Mumbai architectural firm Shashi Prabhu Associates, Boston-based site designers ZNA, Boston-based exhibit designers Christopher Chadbourne Associates, and Bollywood film expert Pravin Nadkar.

The dynamism and vitality of Bollywood is reflected in every part of the design for the World Class Bollywood Museum at Film City, Mumbai. We propose a museum that is light, airy, colorful, grand, dramatic, refreshing, and full of motion, all in the spirit of celebrating Bollywood. For the visitor we have created a destination, a place to spend the day exploring and learning about Bollywood, right in the heart of the industry. With its dynamic spaces and multiple elements, the World Class Bollywood Museum is a community resource that people will feel excited to enjoy again and again.

Giant filmstrips shape the museum building; their undulating curves give the building's exterior a sense of movement and whimsy, while inside allowing light to enter at the clerestory level. At night, these same windows project light outwards, illuminating the museum and projecting its presence. The curving shapes of the exterior will be mirrored by curves inside for a visually pleasing interior.

On this spectacular and strategically placed site at the very door to Film City and Bollywood itself, the approach to the museum reveals landscaped terraces leading toward a set of curved filmstrips that seem to float over a light-filled, poetic complex. It is a site and building built as a metaphor for the structure of Bollywood films themselves. The Museum and site borrow from the Parsi theatrical influence on Bollywood films, which "blended realism and fantasy, music and dance, narrative and spectacle, earthy dialogue and ingenuity of stage presentation, integrated into a dramatic discourse of melodrama."





Discovery Park of America

Union City, Tennessee

Role: Architect & Museum Planner for New Museum; Lead team of engineers, landscape designers, and specialist consultants; Lead team of Exhibit Designers (Thinc Design) and Fabricators (Maltbie)

Program: Interactive science, history and art exhibits, a traveling exhibit gallery, theaters, lobby, restaurant, gift shop, function space, classrooms, exhibit space, and offices

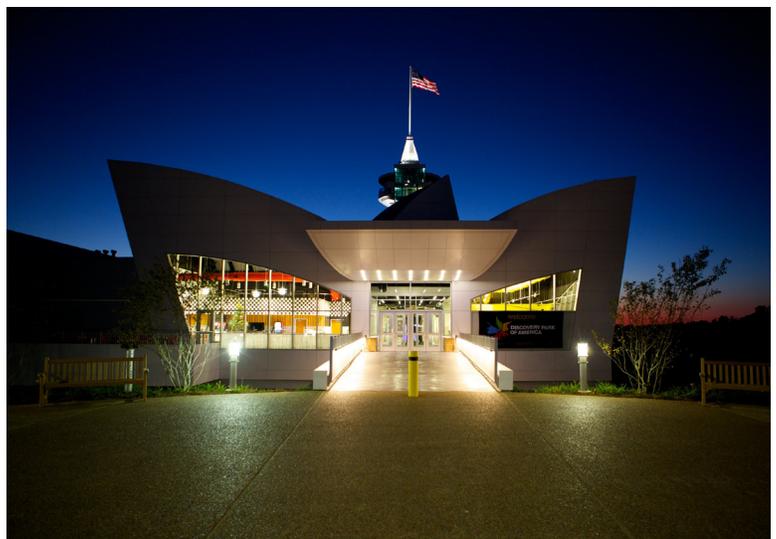
Building Area: 100,000 sf

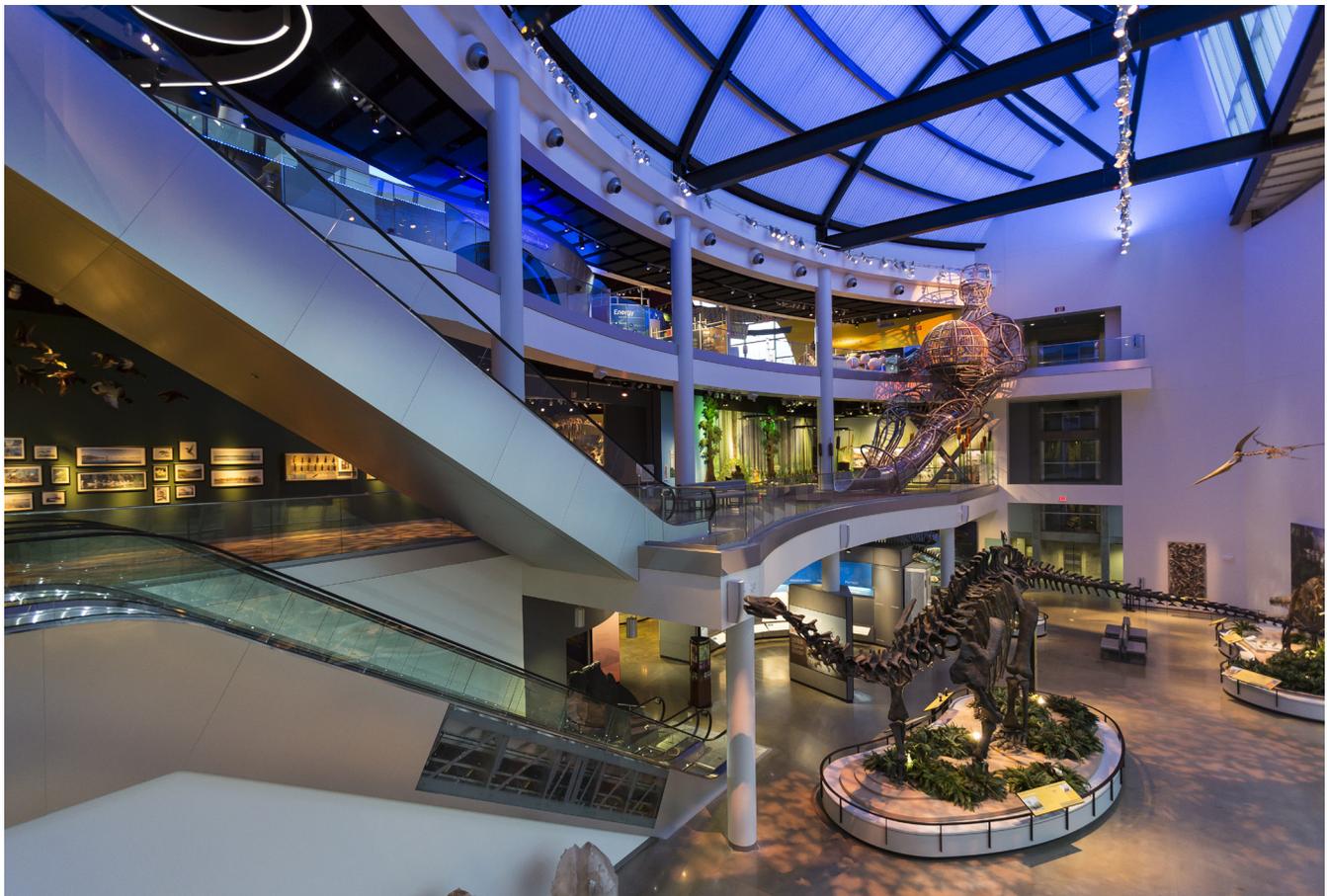
Status: Opened in 2013

Description: Located in a lush 50-acre park at the edge of a small rural town in western Tennessee, the new Discovery Center is a landmark that is completely unexpected in its context. Designed using flowing organic curves silhouetted against the blue sky and green park space, the architecture takes on many playful and mysterious connotations that suggest a place filled with adventure and exploration. Its white curving forms and soaring tower can be seen from miles away in the flat farmlands that surround it, especially when illuminated at night.

The three-level, 100,000 square foot museum features ten galleries with more than 70,000 SF of exhibits, and also includes a themed restaurant, gift shop, classrooms, and a traveling exhibit gallery. With its complex mix of multi-story spaces filled with dinosaurs, airplanes, theaters, and even a giant climb-through human sculpture, families feel both welcomed and engaged. A curved glass oval-shaped space offers open vistas to the surrounding park from the exhibit atrium. Visitors take an elevator up the 200-foot tall observation tower, experiencing views into the exhibit halls then to the outside. This offers a unique perspective from within the Museum to the world beyond the region, inspiring visitors to “look beyond” the constraints of their own lives to what is possible.

This new educational and entertainment complex offers learning and recreational experiences rarely available outside of urban areas. The Center's nine exhibition galleries interpret topics as diverse as natural history, regional history, space science, alternative energy, military history, enlightenment, transportation, and Native American cultures. Signature exhibits include an earthquake simulator, an interactive starship theater, and a secret vault that houses treasures from around the globe. A children's exploration area features a giant climb-through human body, water play, and building block activities.





Flint Hills Discovery Center

Manhattan, Kansas

Role: Architect & Museum Planner for New Museum; lead team of engineers and specialist consultants; lead team of Exhibit Designers (Hilferty & Associates)

Program: Interactive science & history exhibits, 4D theater, lobby, cafe, gift shop, function space, classrooms, exhibit support, and offices

Building Area: 35,000 sf

Status: Opened 2012

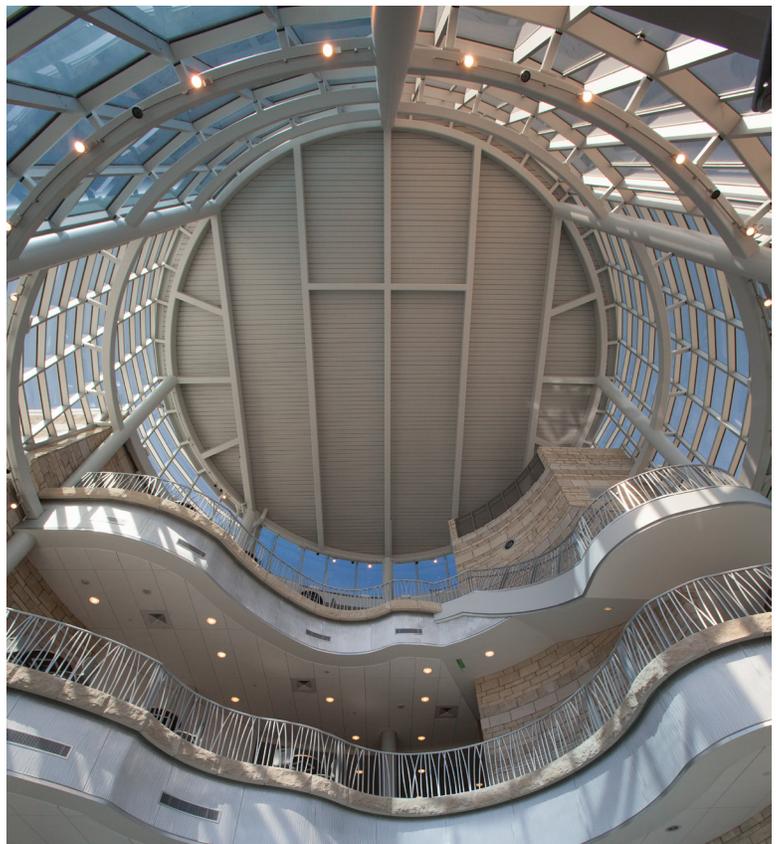
LEED Gold

Description: VernerJohnson developed a Comprehensive Master Plan for the Flint Hills Discovery Center that will inspire people to celebrate, explore, and care for the Flint Hills Prairie of Kansas. Our consultant team provided clear programmatic and financial guidelines that ensure that the new Discovery Center is sustainable and meets the needs of the community.

The Architectural and Interpretive Concepts provided the City of Manhattan with a platform from which they could garner support and funding for the project. Since that initial planning phase, VernerJohnson and exhibit designers Hilferty and Associates were hired to implement the building, site, and exhibit design for this unique destination.

Inspired by the Museum's mission and its location, we designed a building sculpted from the natural landscape itself - a series of landscaped terraces transition effortlessly into a limestone and glass museum that emerges organically from the park. For the exterior of the building, we chose various types of limestone for their color and texture to create unique patterns on the surface of the building, while the undulating walls echo the natural shapes of the prairie and helps the building to further meld with its natural surroundings.

Since opening to the public in April of 2012, this Museum has already exceeded attendance expectations. It features interactive science and history exhibits, an immersion theater and other educational components as a part of a fully integrated visitor experience.





Tampa Bay History Center

Tampa, Florida

Role: Architect & Museum Planner for New Museum; Lead team of engineers and specialist consultants; collaborated with exhibit designers (Christopher Chadbourne)

Program: Interactive history exhibits, theaters, lobby, cafe, gift shop, library, collections, function space, classrooms, exhibit support, and offices

Building Area: 63,000 sf

Status: Opened in 2009

LEED Silver

Description: The Tampa Bay History Center is located on a waterfront site in downtown Tampa positioned along the southern end of a two-mile long pedestrian riverwalk that connects many of the museums and cultural facilities in the city. The new museum tells the rich history of the Tampa region through immersive and interactive exhibits and theaters, designed by Christopher Chadbourne and Associates. The building is also designed to help draw together the diverse cultures and communities in the region through dramatic interior and exterior gathering and function spaces. The multi-level atrium lobby is filled with suspended colorful exhibit “icons” representing Tampa’s history and culture.

Mission: Making history transparent, engaging, and relevant was the driving force for the Tampa Bay History Center’s architecture. Constructed on the site that commemorates the first cultural contact between early Native Americans and European explorers in the 16th century, the architectural approach was to rethink the notion of the “stuffy” history museum. The result is a building that echoes the mission of the museum as a gateway to Tampa Bay’s history and a connection to a larger understanding of where we are now and how we impact our future. The museum was conceived as an open and engaging civic structure, designed to operate as a hub for the community, fully integrated into the surrounding urban environment.

Vision: In conceptualizing a history museum, the fundamental dilemma is which particular aspect, imagery, or story should the design evoke. For the History Center, the architectural solution was inspired by the nature of history itself, highlighting the diversity of Tampa Bay in an abstract, contemporary, and celebratory way. Through its interlocking volumes of contrasting materials, textures, and colors, the design interprets the idea that multiple concurrent and often conflicting stories together make up a region’s history and forge the identity of a place.





National Infantry Museum

Columbus, Georgia

Role: Architect & Museum Planner for New Museum; lead team of engineers and specialist consultants; collaborated with a team of Exhibit Designers (Christopher Chadbourne)

Program: Interactive military history exhibits (65,000 sf), theaters, lobby, cafe, gift shop, function space, archives, collections, classrooms, exhibit support, and offices

Building Area: 185,000 sf

Status: Opened in 2009

Description: The National Infantry Museum is located on a 200-acre site connecting Ft. Benning and the City of Columbus. This dramatic new museum is a place to simultaneously preserve and share the heritage of the U.S. Army Infantry. Through dynamic spaces, including 65,000 SF of interactive exhibits and theaters, it presents the contributions of the Infantry to the founding and growth of the nation and the preservation of freedom throughout the world. The museum is organized around the primary message, "The Infantry Owns the Last 100 Yards." Visitors literally traverse a 100-yard upward sloping ramp accompanying the Infantry through 234 years of its history. The National Infantry Foundation, the museum's sponsoring organization led by Major General Jerry White, set high goals for the new facility that would replace Ft. Benning's aging museum. Beyond a permanent home for an enviable collection of 30,000 military artifacts and a fitting memorial to Infantrymen everywhere, the Foundation envisioned the new museum as a place to educate the American public on the role of a military branch that parallels the nation's history. Specifically, the Foundation targeted a state-of-the-art museum so interactive and entertaining that it would attract 500,000 visitors a year to dynamic galleries, high-tech classrooms, experiential theaters, and ceremonial venues. As for the design of the building and development of the 200-acre site, the Foundation sought a world-class facility that would link Fort Benning with Columbus, GA and serve as a catalyst for economic growth. The museum's message is best illustrated by the fact that no war in all of history has been won without an Infantryman seizing the land at the very end. Thus, the design challenge was the creation of The Last 100 Yards—an exhibit that stretches out like a bayonet through the central gallery space, ascending from the first to the second floor of the museum. As the museum's signature exhibit, this powerful multi-dimensional cinematic experience was designed to enlist visitors into the ranks of the Infantry as they take the final advance over more than 200 years of American history, from the Revolutionary Era to the Gulf Wars.





The Franklin Institute

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Role: Architect for Renovation and Historic Preservation; lead team of engineers and specialist consultants

Program: Multi-media presentation in a renovated historic rotunda, transforming its use as a special events space and exhibit area, including adjacent lobby and support areas

Area: 10,000 sf

Status: Opened in 2008

Description: This project included the renovations of Franklin Hall and the main entrance foyer space, Jordan Hall. Franklin Hall, a National Memorial housing a 30 ton marble statue of Benjamin Franklin, is modeled after the Roman Pantheon. All existing surfaces – marble, bronze and acoustical plaster - were cleaned and restored to conservation standards.

New dramatic lighting was introduced, providing ultimate flexibility for lighting the memorial, creating special exhibit effects, and for rental events. We re-introduced controlled natural lighting into Franklin Hall and provided acoustical surfaces, critical for the new exhibit multi-media show and the well-functioning use of the Hall for banquets and lectures.



MIT Museum

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Role: Architect & Museum Planner for Renovated and Expanded Museum; lead team of engineers and specialist consultants

Program: Interactive science, history and art exhibits, lobby, cafe, gift shop, collections storage, classrooms, function spaces, support and offices

Status: Opened in phases: 2007 & 2012

Description: The MIT Museum presented several particularly complex challenges. The existing warehouse building suffered from serious humidity and temperature control issues, poor collection storage areas, a limited amount of exhibit space, and a minimal connection to street level. Working closely with the Museum staff, we established a multi-phase strategy which allows the Museum to develop and expand their building as funding becomes available. The first phase of work created an inviting exhibit space on the street level, and established a strong presence on the street by opening up the facade with large windows. This exhibit space meets MIT's specific needs as flexible multi-use space, incorporating a multimedia presentation area, changing exhibit gallery, a new entry and ticket area, and a relocated and newly designed museum store. The Museum saw a 50% growth in attendance and a 400% growth in retail sales once this phase was complete.

This allowed funding to be available for Phase II, a 150 year anniversary gallery on the second floor, and Phase III, a new photography gallery in a portion of the building located within an un-insulated solid masonry envelope. To achieve the required museum standard climate control for photography, VernerJohnson developed a unique and cost effective "superwall" enclosure within the existing structure that allows temperature and humidity control within the space but enables the exterior wall to breathe and not suffer any damage.



Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Role: Architect & Museum Planner for Renovation and Expansion; lead team of engineers and specialist consultants.

Program: Interactive science & natural history and art exhibits, lobby, cafe, gift shop, function space, library, labs, classrooms, exhibit support, and offices

Total Building Area: 1 million sf

Status: "Dinosaurs in Their Time" Expansion opened 2007

LEED Silver

Description: The Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh encompass more than one million square feet of space in four major museums. In addition to programming for all four museums, our work has included conceptual planning for a proposed expansion to The Andy Warhol Museum, recommendations for visitor services areas including an expanded lobby for the Museum of Art and Natural History, and extensive planning for the reconfiguration, renovation and expansion to the Museum of Natural History.

At the Museum of Natural History, we completed a new Molecular Lab, a new Library with rare book storage area, and a new Temporary Exhibit Gallery that met the stringent temperature and humidity requirements of national traveling exhibitions.

We also were the architects for a new 18,000 SF expansion and the renovation of adjacent exhibit areas, home of the Museum's world class dinosaur collection. "Dinosaurs in Their Time" is the first permanent exhibition in the world to feature scientifically accurate, immersive environments spanning the Mesozoic Era—the Age of Dinosaurs—arranged chronologically and filled with actively posed original fossil specimens. All of this construction was done without closing the Museum.

The Pittsburgh Historic Commission granted their annual award to the Carnegie's "Dinosaurs in Their Time" for its outstanding efforts toward sympathetic historic rehabilitation.





Columbia Museum of Art

Columbia, South Carolina

Role: Museum Planner and Conceptual Designer for Museum Renovations; Lead team of specialist museum consultants

Program: Art galleries, collection storage, auditorium, library, lobby, cafe, gift shop, function spaces, classrooms, exhibit support, and offices

Building Area: 130,000 sf

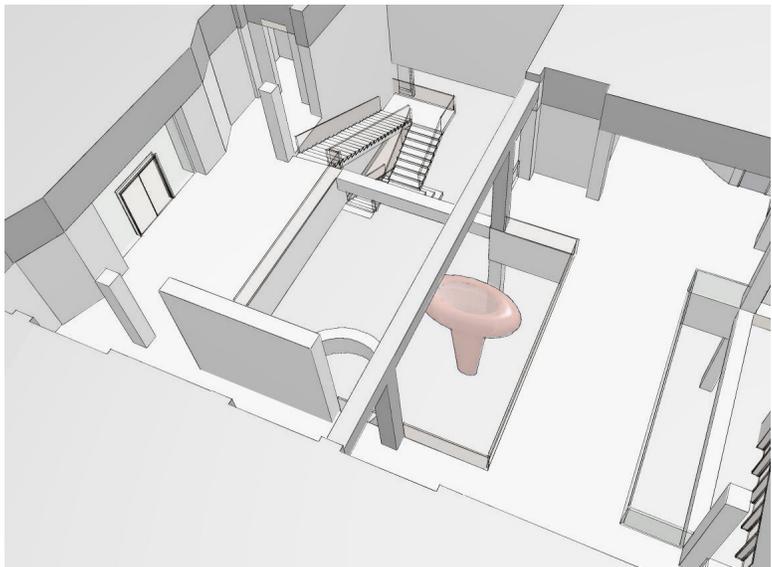
Status: In fundraising stage, scheduled to begin construction in 2015

Description: Verner Johnson, along with museum gallery and lighting designers George Sexton Associates, audience evaluator Kathleen Tinworth, and economic sustainability analyst Elaine Carmichael, worked with the Columbia Museum of Art to develop a Comprehensive Master Plan that addresses issues of financial sustainability and facility functionality. The Plan, which was driven by institutional needs and goals, visitor surveys and stakeholder interviews, presents strategies to attract visitors and improve their experience, highlight and engage the collection, expand the successful educational program, enhance event/rental opportunities, and increase revenue streams to improve overall financial health.

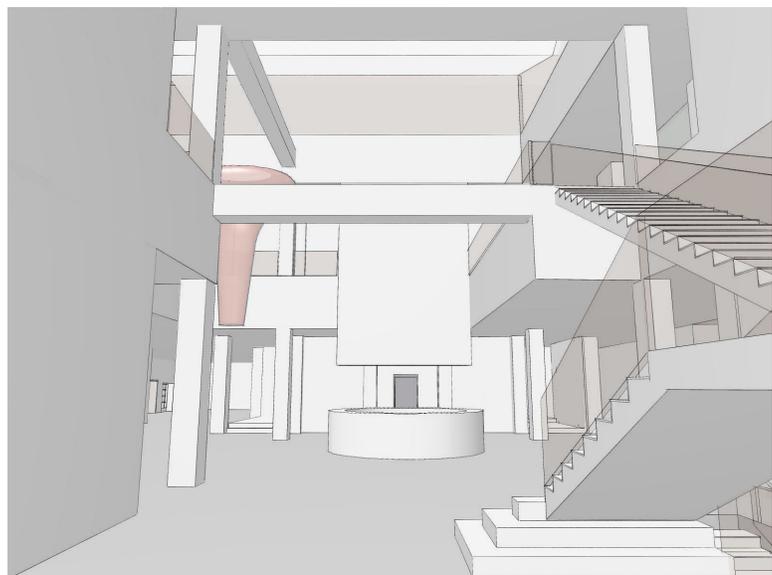
The phased Plan seeks to engage Main Street with a new entrance, banners, clear glass, the expansion of the Museum shop and the addition of a cafe, which extends to the sidewalk and terrace with exterior seating. The visitor experience will be improved with better wayfinding, including a new open stair that places visitors at the entrance to the second floor permanent galleries. Gallery space will be expanded, allowing for flexibility and multiple shows in the temporary galleries and display of more of the collection in the permanent galleries. The library, auditorium and educational programming will be expanded and relocated to the lower level opening the first floor for gallery, retail and event functions. Dedicated event space will be added on the first and second floors providing the opportunity for simultaneous events and increased revenue. By completing the Plan in phases rather than all at once, the Museum will be able to fulfill its goals and manage its capital resources while minimizing operational disruption.



New entrance and banners along Main Street



View of new stair and reconfigured balcony from above



New open stair and lobby configuration from new entrance

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

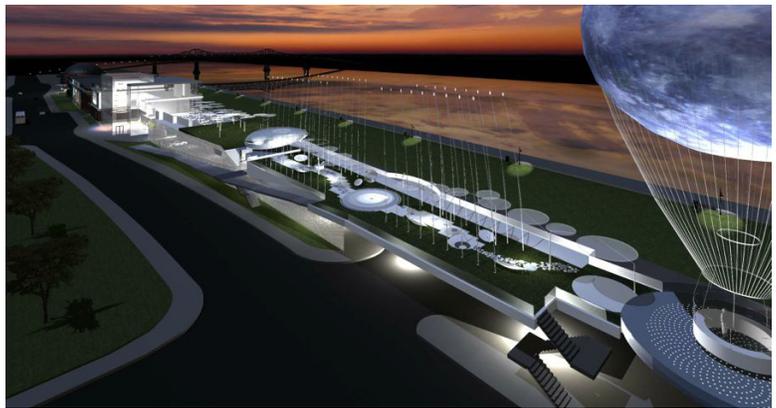
Status: Awaiting funding

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.

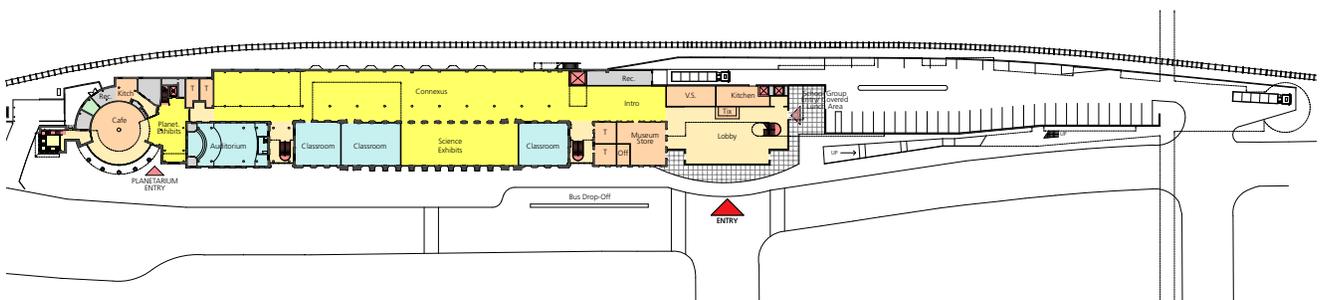
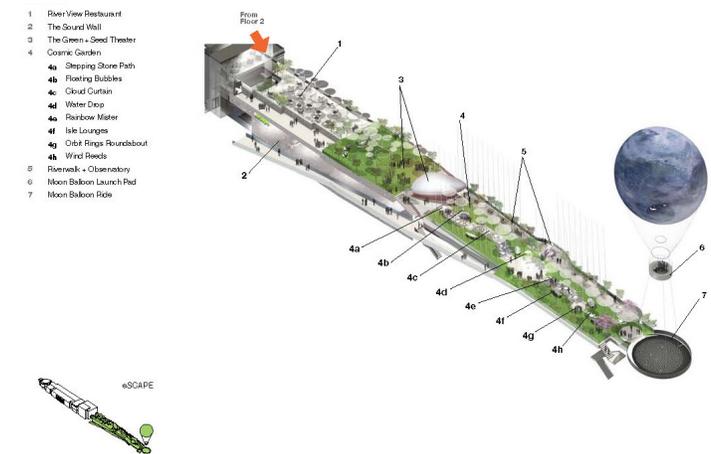
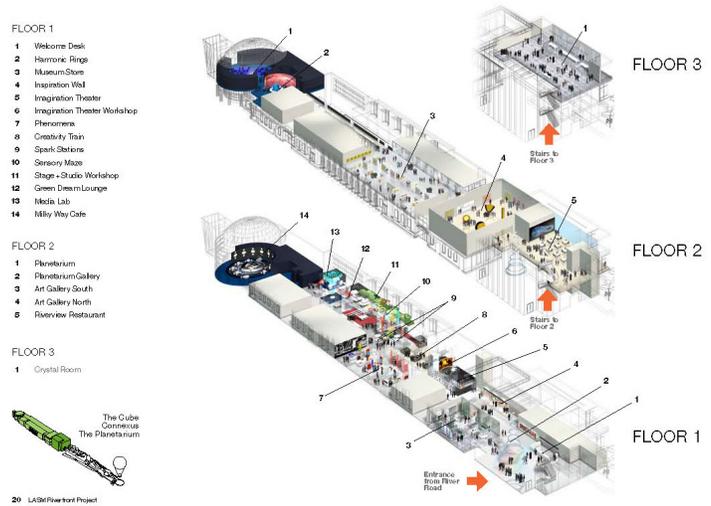
In our Museum planning study, we carefully studied the Museum's program and existing site conditions to devise a concept that would serve as an institution-wide approach to exploring the intersection of art and science. Our initial work focused on their internal space needs.



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.



Tarble Arts Center

Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois

Role: Architect and Museum Planner for Museum Expansion

Program: Art galleries, lobby, function space, classroom, and support areas

Building Area (expansion): 10,000 sf

Status: Opened in 2006

Description: This university arts center serves as a focal point of the visual arts for a seven-county area in central Illinois as well as an integral hub for inspiration and creativity on the Eastern Illinois University campus. Informed by the Museum's mission to "take the arts to the people," the building was constructed along a well-established campus pedestrian path leading from the central academic part of the campus to student dormitories. Unique to this Museum is its transparency to the community; the building's forms, integrated landscaping and site elements transform the pathway into outdoor rooms featuring both permanent sculptures and changing installations. A physical manifestation of the Museum's desire to reach a number of important communities is the existence of two main entrances, one along the pedestrian path used by members of the University and another facing the adjacent residential neighborhood, inviting Illinois residents to make use of the facility as well.

In addition to gallery space, the Museum includes robust art studios and work areas, a carpentry shop, a theater and an E-Gallery for multimedia art. The gallery spaces were designed for maximal flexibility, and include movable partitions. Skylight monitors with electrically operated black-out shades and concealed artificial lighting provide completely controllable natural and artificial light. This system eliminates reflection problems and "visual noise," as well as respects the conservation requirements of the art. All galleries and collection storage areas have strict humidity and temperature control. A dynamic multi-purpose gathering space features a curved glass façade and clerestory lighting. During the day, black-out curtains can transform the space for a variety of installations or performances. In the evening, the transparency of the façade creates a seamless relationship between indoors and outdoors.

VernerJohnson designed the original building and because of our unique and successful design process and our commitment to building consensus at all levels, when the Tarble Arts Center was looking to expand, VernerJohnson was again hired for the addition. The resulting addition seamlessly joins the original Museum building without affecting the existing ease of the visitor experience.





Kansas Cosmosphere and Space Center

Hutchinson, Kansas

Role: Museum Planner & Conceptual Designer for Comprehensive Museum Revitalization Plan

Program: Renovated existing exhibits, new educational interactive and participatory exhibits, new Entrance with a signature canopy, newly defined free/paid zones, renovated Space Camp, new Introductory Gallery, new Temporary Gallery, new Kids Discovery Room, new Current & Future Technology Gallery, and new Science Now area.

Building Area: Phase One: 105,000 sf renovation plus expansion.

Status: Beginning Architectural phase.

Description: The existing Cosmosphere museum houses the world's second largest U.S. space artifact collection (second only to the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum) and the largest collection of Russian space artifacts outside of Moscow. In recent years, the institution was seeing the effects of an economic recession, a waning interest in space exploration history, and a loyal supporter base that was aging out. In 2013, VJI was commissioned to develop a comprehensive Museum Revitalization Plan for their long-term sustainability and future.

VernerJohnson developed an new exciting and economic viability vision that included institutional, physical, operational and implementation recommendations. VJI determined that the institution should not significantly expand their physical facility (at least initially), but rather pursue a rebranding that increased the institution's national and international visibility and broadened its mission, programs, and visitor experiences. Against the backdrop of a world-class collection of artifacts and space science exhibits, the proposed new focus would extend beyond just space history to include informal learning opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

By reorganizing and consolidating the public circulation areas within the museum, VJI was able to make better use of underutilized and inefficient space, transforming them into new and improved exhibition, public program and support areas. This is a highly cost effective approach that significantly enhanced Cosmosphere's long-term financial sustainability. New current, relevant, constantly changing displays will educate visitors about what is happening right now in the world of space exploration, and the insertion of dedicated areas within the museum that offer updated, relevant, immersive, and interactive experiences for visitors (of all ages) will encourage return visits.

