

North Carolina Museum of Art West Building Architect's Statement

Our approach to designing the new building for the North Carolina Museum of Art was to emphasize openness and connections to nature. The Museum is designed to sit gently upon a carpet of natural landscape. As visitors approach the campus from a serpentine road or walkway, the structure appears as a single volume that merges into the landscape. The exterior reflects the surrounding land and sky, creating an ethereal effect on its surface of anodized aluminum and stainless steel.

Entry to the building is punctuated by structured allées of trees, extending the rigorous geometry of the building into the landscape yet allowing for a transition to the less formal Museum Park. Designed with landscape architects Lappas + Havener of Durham, North Carolina, the landscape and five garden courts reinforce the building's open plan and transparency to create a feeling of accessibility and a strong connection to nature.

The decision to make a one-story building grew out of the challenge to create ideal viewing conditions for the Museum's permanent collection. A single story allows for the maximum amount of controlled top light in all art spaces while still meeting conservation requirements. A revolutionary system of rhythmic vaults and coffers developed by our office, in collaboration with daylight engineers at Ove Arup of London, brings nature inside the entire building by capturing and controlling daylight through highly engineered layers of louvers and filters. Less than one percent of available daylight is allowed into the building—more than enough to create softly diffused illumination.

Thomas Phifer and Partners

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