

METROPOLIS

OBSERVED



ARCHITECTS
 Thomas Phifer and Partners
www.tphifer.com

PROJECT
 North Carolina Museum of Art
www.ncartmuseum.org

Light Work

When Thomas Phifer and Arup developed a budget for their expansion of the North Carolina Museum of Art five years ago, they weren't outlining financial expenditures—they were determining lighting levels. "We calculated how much light was best for each kind of art," Phifer says. "Then we worked to create a museum with a system of variable levels."

As a result, the museum's permanent collection has moved from a dark, Brutalist four-story structure by Edward Durell Stone into a bright, adjoining shed that gives visitors better access to the artwork. And since the building is only one story, the architects can control the top light. Louvers on the roof let in only gentle northern illumination, while oculi covered with one of four scrims—from a sheer to a blackout fabric—help provide the appropriate amount of light for each room. Similarly, three types of curtains shade the glass walls. "Curatorially, everything blends now," Phifer says. "We toned down the architecture to better show the art."

Criswell Lappin / +