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AS ASSETS GO, A MUSEUM'S COLLECTION IS ITS GREATEST.

By 2000, the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh (NCMA) needed a larger home for its growing collection, which includes works by Homer, Bierstadt, Giotto, and Giacometti. In planning to move the permanent collection to a new building, which was completed in 2010 by the architecture firm Thomas Phifer and Partners with Pearce Brinkley Cease + Lee, the museum incorporated its other great asset into the expansion plan: a 164-acre site between Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill.

The firm Peter Walker and Partners (PWP) was originally hired by NCMA in 2006 to design the landscape around the new addition, working with the Durham firm of Lappas + Havener. Walker completed schematic designs for the museum's grounds,

which included several elements that survive today, including an entry allée and a series of reflecting pools meant to mirror the building's planes. But Walker left the project in 2007 (museum officials and members of the design team have been rather reticent around this issue), and the museum turned to Lappas + Havener to complete the design, which received an award of excellence last fall from the North Carolina Chapter of ASLA.

For the museum and sculpture park, Lappas + Havener developed a design for the entire site, from a series of formal sculpture courts around Phifer's new West Building outward to a looser, pastoral sculpture park that follows an existing greenway. "The interpretation of nature in the more rural part of the site is the framework for this museum landscape," says Walt Havener, ASLA, the principal designer. "We've taken the rolling topography [of the greenway] and intensified it around the museum in terms of landforms and drainage."

It's a topography Lappas + Havener knew better than just about anyone. The firm has been involved with the museum since the early 2000s, before Walker's or Phifer's arrival in Raleigh, and had completed an early site plan for the museum's property. The firm's



THIS PAGE
NCMA's South Court holds 14 granite sculptures from western North Carolina.

OPPOSITE PAGE
Ornate cast-iron sculpture of Giotto, a series of stacked cedar and granite discs assembled on site, draw visitors into the museum's south meadow.

IMAGE CREDITS
© Ramsey, this page; Jesse Taylor, opposite



RIGHT

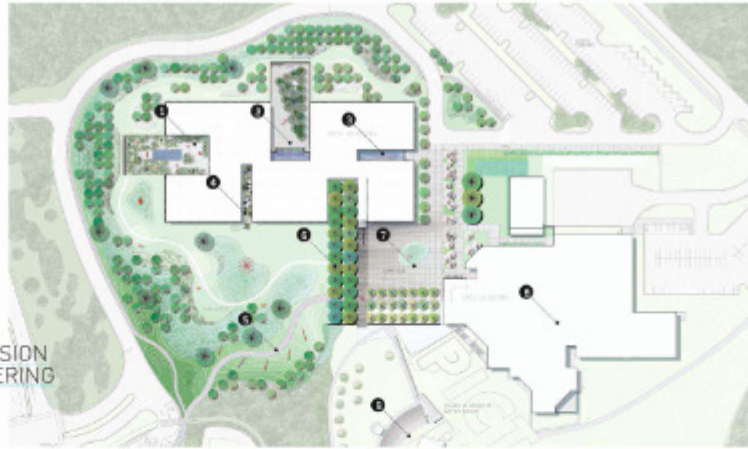
The entire building and its outdoor spaces can be accessed by a meandering path through a grove of river birches, redive redbud, oaks, and locust trees.

- 1 Med. Building, Center Court
- 2 Entry Court 1
- 3 East Court
- 4 South Court
- 5 Entry Path
- 6 Entry Court (Elev. Med)
- 7 Entry Plaza
- 8 East Building
- 9 Arch. Theater

IMAGE CREDIT

Center Court, photo: Thomas North Carolina Museum of Art

EXPANSION RENDERING



HOW MANY AMERICAN MUSEUMS COUNT THE LANDSCAPE AMONG THEIR PRIME ASSETS?

scheme for the bioretention pond that now sits southeast of the museum buildings also dates from this period.

Since 1983, NCMA operated out of an ungainly brick bunker designed by Edward Durrell Stone and completed after his death. The building had major problems from the beginning. It came in way over budget, so many of its galleries had to be cut and the collection hung wherever there was wall space—including spaces along the walls of a cavernous atrium. Stone's original scheme included a series of Babylonian terraces that were also value-engineered out in the end, making it appear as though the museum—shrunken and demoted—had helplessly landed in a mowed field.

The plan for Puffer's 127,000-square-foot West Building is a central hall with five galleries that spiral away from its spine. It's a highly orthodox grid, to be sure, that orders the building's structure as well as your movement. Everything seems to snap to a line. Within that framework, five exterior courts open in the spaces between extruded galleries—some are long and thin; others are foreshortened and broad. Each gallery is programmed in concert with an elemental focus—on stone, water, or rock—and conspicuously named for donors.



LEFT

Robert Rindler's *Time Element* also diagonally across the Walker Court to treat as all various materials and grid.

BELOW

Water is the central focus of the museum's landscape and the entry plaza, but the path is still.

IMAGE CREDITS

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THE ENTRY PLAZA ACTS AS A HINGE BETWEEN CONVENTIONAL MUSEUM SPACE AND THE LANDSCAPE BEYOND.



1 WALL

A blue-painted brick wall surrounds the building, the Carter G. Woodson Center.

2 CANOPY

A canopy of trees is located in the courtyard, which is a central feature of the site.

3 ELMS

Elms are planted along the path, which is a central feature of the site.

4 PATH

The path is a central feature of the site, which is a central feature of the site.

5 RAINROOF

The rainroof is a central feature of the site, which is a central feature of the site.

6 LANDSCAPE

The landscape is a central feature of the site, which is a central feature of the site.

IMAGE CREDITS

- 1. Carter G. Woodson Center - North Carolina Museum of History
- 2. Scott Prosser - N.C. Museum of History
- 3. Carter G. Woodson Center - North Carolina Museum of History
- 4. Scott Prosser - N.C. Museum of History
- 5. Scott Prosser - N.C. Museum of History
- 6. Scott Prosser - N.C. Museum of History



ABOVE
 Striations in the wall
 part of the story that
 defines the museum's
 natural flow and the
 way it looks.

IMAGE CREDIT
 Courtesy of the
 North Carolina Museum
 of Art

On the western Center Court, which is bisected by a big reflecting pool and forces you to approach its Rodin bronze and bamboo canes in a roundabout way. On the north is Bryan Court, which is more of a ramble among perennial beds and Chinese elms. Bryan Court also contains two sculptures that are notable: Robert Bladen's *Three Elements*, which slices diagonally across the court to break an otherwise monotonous grid, and Lippase + Havener's black, poured-in-place concrete wall that defines the court's western border. Striations in the wall, which are remnants of sand randomly distributed during the pouring process, rough up an otherwise sleek patio of granite pavers.

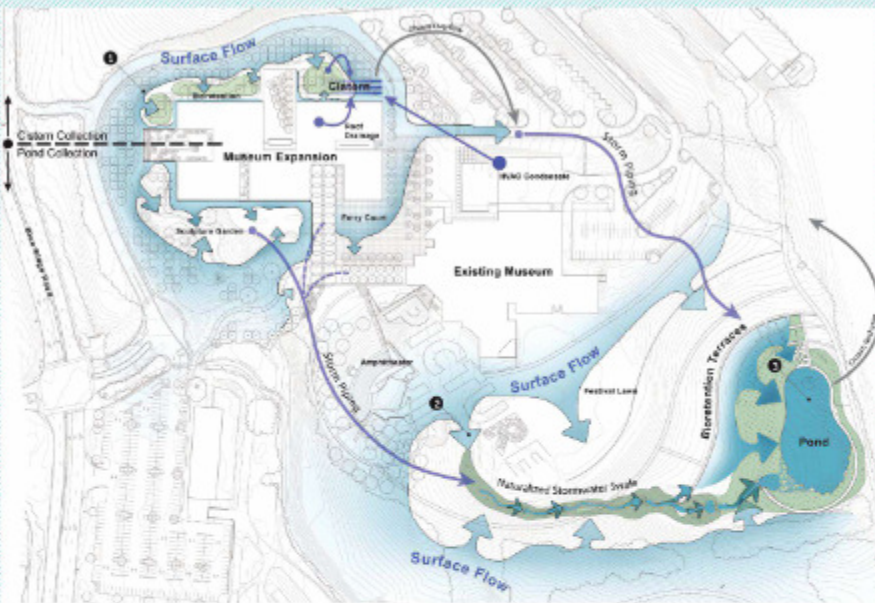
Phifer's expansion has an entry plaza, but it doesn't have a back side. The entire building and its sculpture courts can be reached by a meandering path through a grove of river birches, native meadow grasses, and fescue lawns. Because the museum does not charge admission, museum officials and the design team agreed that access to the galleries and courts does not have to be as highly controlled as it is at a museum that does charge. "The porosity of this building is unique," Havener says, "and because it's a free institution, you can enter from four different points and have different paths and experiences through the landscape."

On this walk around the Phifer building, two smaller courts appear as skinny incisions into the building's cubic volume: a pool to the east that uses black dye to enhance its reflectivity and a boulder garden to the south, which is dotted with six-million-year-old granite rocks from western North Carolina and grounded by beds of vinca and heliopsis.

People arriving at the museum can see the South Court as they move down toward the entry plaza. In the larger scheme, each of these courts actually acts as a stage you're supposed to view from the museum's interior. Phifer's interest in transparency plays out here in an almost voyeuristic way: The translucent sun shades that screen natural light into the museum also act as veils that blur the view out. The forms in each of the exterior courts—Rodins and rocks and so forth—appear in a soft white haze. You can detect people and sculpture outside, but the view in from one of these courts is obscured by these sun shades, and the courts effectively become stage sets.

The fifth court is the entry plaza, which brings you in from one of two skillfully hidden parking lots and governs the circulation

POND+BIORETENTION PROJECT



1 BIORETENTION Road surface flow is captured by a bioretention basin between the Cantor and Wheeler courts.

2 SWALE Surface flow from the museum's central lawn cascades into a naturalized stormwater swale.

3 RECHARGE The pond includes permeable materials that allow rainwater to infiltrate after collection from multiple sources.

IMAGE CREDIT
 COURTESY LAPPAS + HAVENER
 NORTH CAROLINA MUSEUM OF ART

A key component in Lappas + Havener's work for the North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) is its pond renovation project, which draws from the museum's cistern and irrigation system. The museum will incorporate the pond into its ecology education programming. It's bordered by two rings of pink step walls and sits at the museum site's far eastern edge along the sculpture park's return path to the museum's campus. As you go from the pond back up toward the museum's plaza, water is continually moving down into the low-lying wetland.

Between an access road to the north and a four-lane city road to the west, NCMA's new West Building landscape acts as a sponge for road surface flow down into a bioretention area between the Bryan and Cantor sculpture courts. Stormwater from these courts, as well as HVAC condensate from the older East Building, are funneled

into a 90,000-gallon cistern just to the east of Bryan Court. Storm piping from this cistern, as well as from the museum's entry court area, feeds into a series of bioretention terraces and a naturalized stormwater swale, which also collects surface flow from the bluff that separates NCMA's sculpture park from its building campus. From these sources, the water empties into the museum's pond, which is surrounded by red switchgrass, little bluestem, and Indiangrass along its upper terrace and a mixture of grasses along its lower terrace.

In this scheme, recycled water can recharge the museum's fountains and irrigation system, even during times of drought restrictions. Lappas + Havener and NCMA, in accordance with its grant from the North Carolina Clean Water Management Fund, hope that the pond will improve water quality in the House Creek basin. ●

NCMA WEST BUILDING PLANTS

SCIENTIFIC NAME

CANTON COURT

Nyctplaza 'Attraction'
Nyctplaza 'Charlie's Choice'
Nyctplaza 'Colorado'
Phyllostachya nuda

COMMON NAME

Attraction water lily
 Charlie's Choice water lily
 Colorado water lily
 Nuda bamboo

CHILDREN'S GARDEN (EAST)

Ilex cornuta 'Sizzler'
Ilex verticillata 'Shadow's Fensale'
Wickstroemia
Panicum virgatum 'Shenandoah'
Quercus 'Jeffries' 'SPGA'
Rosa 'Radburny'

Smiler holly
 Nupper holly
 Florida aralia
 Red switchgrass
 Hightower willow oak
 SunnyKnack Out rose

EAST COURT

Phyllostachya nuda 'Hale'

Dwarf black bamboo

ENTRY COURT

Acer rubrum 'October Glory'
Diospyros nigra 'Dura Heat'
Berberis aquifolium 'Jesse Blaney'
Helleborus orientalis 'Candy Love'
Magnolia grandiflora 'Little Gem'
Magnolia 'soulangiana' Dark Alexander'
Nipeta 'Snowflake'
Palibicoccus albidus 'Mini'
Ulmus americana 'Princeton'

October Glory red maple
 Dura Heat redbark
 Essey japonica
 Candy Love hellebore
 Little Gem magnolia
 Dark Alexander magnolia
 Snowflake catnip
 Dwarf bamboo
 Princeton American elm

MEADOW

Quercus 'nuttallii' GNFPA'
Quercus 'alversonii' GDFPC'
Schizachyrium scoparium

Hightail Nuttall oak
 Parache Alverson oak
 Little bluestem

NORTH GARDEN RED-CELLS

Acer rubrum 'Red Sunset'
Juncus effusus
Rosa 'Radburny'

Red Sunset red maple
 Common rush
 SunnyKnack Out rose

SOUTH COURT (BOULDER)

Helleborus orientalis 'Candy Love'
Vicia cracca

Candy Love hellebore
 Common pershickie

SOUTH ENTRY WALK

Acer glabrum 'Red November'
Berberis julianae 'Spring Glory'
Ilex verticillata 'Shadow's Fensale'

Red November Amur maple
 Spring Glory barberry
 Nupper holly

WHEELER COURT

Carex muskingumensis 'Delene'
Melvinia 'Merro Dotas'
Polypodium polypodioides
Ulmus parvifolia 'Emer II'
Vicia cracca

Variegated palm sedge
 Merro Botan lily
 Nanna batoniere
 Alice lacebark elm
 Common pershickie

for the entire complex. An American elm allée, which survives from Walker's original scheme, defines the museum complex's processional path and marks the entrance to the amphitheater and sculpture park, which includes a clever in-ground piece by the installation artist Barbara Kruger that's largely imperceptible unless you are staring at an aerial photograph of the site.

The plaza acts as a hinge between conventional museum space and the landscape beyond. But it's a creaky hinge. Even if it's clear to someone standing in the plaza that the amphitheater is an obvious part of the museum experience, the sculpture park beyond is not as visually obvious. You have to walk the length of a football field and forge ahead over a bluff to reach it.

Once you do, though, you are greeted by Thomas Sayre's *Gyre*, an enormous, three-ring gateway for the sculpture park's meandering paths. One path leads to a belvedere and the other becomes the House Creek section of the Reedy Creek Greenway. "The sculpture park has a strong environmental education component to it, and bringing people through, via the gateway, is a way to stretch that message," Havener says.

The sculpture park, which is open to the public, defines the southern half of the museum's entire site. The paths, activated by site-specific pieces like Martha Jackson-Jarvis's mosaic monolith *Crossroads/Trickster I* and Jim Galucci's twisted *Whisper Bench*, represent both museum programming as well as places to relax. Tongue-in-cheek picture frames hung along the wooded portion of the gateway (with a rotating series of paintings) are juxtaposed with small shelters such as Chris Drury's *Cloud Chamber for the Trees and Sky*, which doubles as a camera obscura.

Although there is art throughout the whole site, Phifer and Lappas + Havener gave the museum experience a hierarchy that has to do with proximity to the museum proper. "The site is a bit like a French landscape," Phifer says, "as things are very rough in the distance, and the closer you get to the château, the more precise things get."

Phifer, Lappas + Havener, and NCMA worked to expand the visitor's experience out of a concern for the museum's continued relevance and a sense of environmental stewardship. They looked to precedents outside of France, like the Kröller-Müller Museum in the Netherlands and Yorkshire Sculpture Park in England. For the NCMA property, Lappas + Havener established a series of paths and spaces that led the visi-

RIGHT

In the center, north water flows into the pond edges of the Center Court's reflecting pool.

IMAGE CREDIT

LOU RAY, JILLIAN HAVENER, North Carolina Museum of Art

"THE PART IS ABOUT AN ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN NATURE AND ART," SAYS WALT HAVENER.

"The part is about an arrangement between nature and art," Havener says, "and the hand of horticulture and maintenance becomes more prevalent the closer you get to the building."

Although the sculpture park is several hundred yards from the museum's courts and plaza, the two spaces conceptually hang together. Stripping the sculpture park's forest down to its most basic elements to reflect texture, color, and structure, Lappas + Havener inserted those elements back into the museum's immediate landscape. Oak trees along the sculpture park's ecotone reappear along the museum's entry path and South Garden, as do the sculpture park's native tall grasses.

Striations in the site's hierarchy become apparent when you stand on a belvedere about 100 yards inland from the sculpture park's entry bluff. Distant sculptures appear along the tree line before the southern edge of a plant, no-mow meadow. A cast-iron smokestack (the remnant of a Civil War prison) stands to the west and paths dip down into the meadow, signaling three distinct paths that contain installation art pieces. Adjacent to the belvedere is a park pavilion by Raleigh's Tonic Design with Mike Cindric, which signals the return path to the museum.

Along that return path, Lappas + Havener have designed a bioretention pond that manages surface water and HVAC condensate with a naturalized stormwater swale, a rock weir, a wetland garden, and a grove of bald cypress. The museum plans to use this area as part of its educational programming.

In a larger sense, NCMA finds its firm the unusual position of curating the equilibrium between old and new concepts of a museum experience: the scripted and the unscripted elements of site as well as art and nature. In its artifice, the pond is a vital way station for the building's ecology, but it also draws nature closer to the more conventional museum spaces on the hill above.

There are other great sculpture parks in the United States—Storm King in New York or Laumeier in St. Louis come to mind—but how many preexisting American art museums count the landscape among



their prime assets beyond a sculpture court? How many even have a landscape to count?

The only other one that comes close is the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA) (see "The Undertaking So Far," page 95). In 2010, the IMA opened its 100 Acres Virginia B. Fairbanks Art and Nature Park west of the museum proper, designed by the late landscape architect Edward Blake with the architect Marlon Blackwell. Like NCMA, the IMA is advancing the idea that an art museum can include site-specific outdoor works in addition to painting and sculpture.

"Save for Indianapolis, there's nothing like what we have here," says Daniel Gottlieb, NCMA director of planning and design. "There are a lot of sculpture parks without our collection, and there are lots of collections without our relationship to the land."

"There is a strong functional relationship between the museum and the land, and there's an educational and curatorial relationship," Havener says. "But poeity and light are really what's at the heart of this project. They're integral to the building's concept of nature in the building, and they guided our ideas about movement through the landscape."

In a recent *Artforum* dedicated to defining the contemporary museum, the Danish artist Olafur Eliasson noted, "I like to distinguish between the museum as a neutral producer and the museum as a really container." NCMA offers a postscript to this distinction as a place to house art and a place to interpret it. The museum has invited the landscape to be part of our conventional notions of a contemporary museum and, as an agent of art's expansive definition, NCMA stands somewhere between exhibition, experience, and ecology. ■

WILLIAM REYNOLDS IS THE EDITOR OF *JAPANESE AND ASIAN ARCHITECTURE*.

Project Credits

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: LAPPAS + HAVENER, INC., DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA; **ARCHITECT:** THOMAS PHIPPS AND PARTNERS, NEW YORK; **ARCHITECT OF RECORD:** PERCE, ORENABLY, DEJONG & LEE ARCHITECTS, RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA; **GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** BLOOMER REALTY CONSTRUCTION INC.; **ASSOCIATION WITH:** BARNHILL CONTRACTING COMPANY; **MEP ENGINEER:** HERRING DESIGN GROUP, NEW YORK; **ASSOCIATE MEP ENGINEER:** STANFORD WHITE ASSOCIATES, RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA; **STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING:** SOM; **CIVIL/GEOTECHNICAL ENGINEER:** HERRING DESIGN; **ELECTRICAL/LEADING DESIGN:** FISHER MAURITZ STONE, NEW YORK; **LANDSCAPE DESIGN:** J.R.P. LORENZ, CIVIL ENGINEER; **GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** BLOOMER REALTY CONSTRUCTION; **STORMWATER ENGINEER:** JAYTECH, DENVER; **GOVERNOR OF NORTH CAROLINA:** ROHILLEA; **SECRETARY OF DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL RESOURCES:** LINDSEY EVAN S. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR; **NONA LAWRENCE J. WHEELER, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND DESIGN; NONA CHIEF P. DOTTLETT.**