

The Art of Building: An Architectural History of the MIA

From large artistic ideals to fine details, see how three buildings from three unique eras work together to form an art museum. Discover architectural complements and elements that weave through the spaces and create relationships among these architectural gems.

Theme suggestion: *Shaping Our Space*

On this tour, think about ways that we use space to put forth ideas, make impressions, create or change moods. Here are some questions to address: How are the spatial and visual needs of an art museum met through the design elements of its building(s)? How do these three architects address those needs?

Route and object suggestions:

- Enter through Kenzo Tange building, on 3rd Ave. side: vast, open, glass, brick and steel; Dale Chihuly sculpture, Tony Berlant collage commissioned for this space (homage to our Asian collection; references a Chinese painted scroll)
- Reality of the lobby; CTC lobby above
- Openness; light-filled space
- Alexander Calder mobile fills open space
- Second floor/ceiling lowers the expanse as you walk into more closed space to get us down to the scale of the McKim wing; architect has “disguised” the immense space
- Stop at ArtsCafe to look out the window to see how Tange addition “wraps/attaches” itself onto Old Main.
- Walk into McKim building, notice Community Commons area, Herberger banks, art from children’s classes: works on a smaller scale, proximity to classroom space
- Grand marble staircase to second floor: access to art, special exhibition galleries.
- Large hallway with columns, marble floors, brass and iron railings: hallmarks of 19th-c. Beaux-Arts/Neoclassical revival style; Classical Greek and Roman collection
- Walk through rotunda, go outside
- View all three buildings (need to cross the street, go into Fair Oaks Park): how Tange preserved Beaux-Arts façade as a “work of art” and reoriented the entire museum

Compare exterior facades:

1915 – McKim, Mead, and White

1974 – Kenzo Tange

2006 – Michael Graves and Associates/Target

Background information while viewing all three buildings:

- In 1883, a group of affluent, like-minded, well-educated citizens drafted the articles of incorporation for Mpls Society of Fine Arts. This group of 14 men and 11 women was dedicated to a three-fold goal: providing a place for ongoing exhibition of art works, presenting informational lectures pertaining to art, and creating an art library for research and general enjoyment/edification. Took thirty-two years to realize their

dream in a majestic Neoclassical building. Early exhibitions held at Public Library at 10th and Hennepin.

- 1915 – Neoclassical revival building clad in Vermont granite designed by competition winners opens its doors: New York architects McKim, Mead & White; part of a grand Plan for Minneapolis for a comprehensive arts complex and broad avenue sweeping southward from downtown to MIA location; only fragment of the plan is realized. (Standing in Fair Oaks park where grand drive would have culminated; think of approach to Philadelphia Museum of Art.)
- 1974 – expansion added two modern wings designed by Japanese architect Kenzo Tange to east and west of original building. Wanted to keep integrity of original façade with columns – see how he wrapped the building around it. Common design elements in windows/cornice/color of bricks. Broad, flat expanse punctuated by small windows, repetitive design of windows.
- June 2006 – New postmodern wing designed by Michael Graves combines neoclassical elegance of original building with stark minimalism of Tange’s addition. Postmodern architecture combines new ideas with traditional forms: use of geometric forms and columns (hallmarks of Greek architecture), squares, recessed areas/niches. We’ll see close up later.

Reenter using Old Main staircase:

- Grand stairs/entryway, inaccessible to anyone with mobility issues. How does it feel to enter here? What if you were three feet tall? (Entering a “sacred” space.) Compare/contrast with Third Ave entrance.
- Focal point of rotunda – what object do you place in such an important visible space?
- Interior vestibule floors of pink Tennessee marble and walls faced with Botticino marble; walk into enclosed, circular space. Look up: atrium open to third floor galleries. Remember this space and how it is used.
- The scale was to be lavish, providing long vistas, abundant light, rich materials, fine craftsmanship, and, most of all, a serene, inviting, impressive space.
- Only 1/7 of the original plan was ever realized. In 1926, a new addition at the center of the rear façade provided for an auditorium, more galleries, cafeteria, shop, storage, and a fountain court. (Look at original 1912 model later.)
- Fountain court classical elements: Corinthian columns, cornice dentils, Roman barrel vault with coffered ceiling, skylight.
- Joining of galleries:
Old Main galleries – enclosed, hallway columns, long vistas, marble and iron/brass vs. Tange galleries – light-filled space, glass, brick, and steel: Buddhism gallery, outdoor view toward downtown (apt spot to contemplate nature; sit at bench in front of Kuan-Yin).
- Head back through Chinese galleries.
- Elevator to third floor galleries: addition of elevator in 1930, before that had to use the stairs.
- To upper rotunda to see gallery focal points, visual teasers: look across galleries to view destination works of art.

- Ceilings with skylights opened up, look at classical motifs used in ceiling, bronze(?) / iron rail of rotunda: egg and dart, cartouche, acanthus leaves, C-scrolls.
- Look at 1912 original model.
- From grand hallway, see view toward Frank and Modern art. Galleries dressed up with parquet flooring.
- “Seamless” entry into new building – large galleries, allow contemporary art to “breathe.” Modernist Design galleries, Frankfurt kitchen (1926) with interactive touch screens (found throughout the museum), Tatra car.
- Third-floor atrium

Facts about Expanded Museum

- New, 113,000-square-foot wing faced in tan Jura limestone from Germany
- Houses galleries dedicated to modern and contemporary design, crafts, textiles, works on paper, paintings, and sculptures
- 49,000 square feet of existing building renovation
- 34 new galleries (27 in new wing; from 109 to 143) and almost 40% new exhibition space (within all spaces)
- MIA would cover 7½ football fields altogether
- New wing showcases our 20th- and 21st-century collections
- Target is the lead contributor – thus, the expansion has been named the Target Wing

Architect Michael Graves

- Received American Institute of Architects’ Gold Medal and National Medal of Arts
- Worked in conjunction with RSP Architects for MIA expansion

Design Aspects

- Three-story central open atrium mimics McKim building; signature element of the design; rises to a domed ceiling of Venetian plaster, which draws inspiration from the original neoclassical rotunda. Dome consists of 62 fiberglass panels that are bolted/fused together. This fiberglass membrane is suspended from steel cables attached to the drum that lets in light. Its interior finish is a cloudlike Venetian plaster that is meant to mimic the appearance of marble. Look down to first floor.
- Floor of Jura limestone from Germany and gray brandy crag from England; Jura limestone/marble (from southern Germany; Jurassic period, 140 million years old in a contemporary wing of the museum). Evidence of prehistoric flora and fauna, quarried in 25 layers to provide wide variety of color and texture. Brandy crag is silver grey stone with contrasting veins, quarried in English Lake District; million of years old.
- Maple woodwork throughout the building. Postmodernism as a response to Modernism: take coldness of steel and glass and warm it up with ample use of wood.
- Maple-paneled, barrel-vaulted reception hall, which accommodates hundreds of people for dinner or other gala events. (Can be rented!) Recalls vault of fountain court.
- Back down to 2nd floor, use light-filled staircase; mimics McKim skylight. Sculpture designed for the stairway by MCAD students.

- Galleries: access Target/special exhibitions, Textiles, Contemporary Craft, MAEP, P&D works on paper.
- Down to 1st floor of new wing, which provides public spaces. Atrium mimics enclosed feeling of McKim building rotunda; find yourself encircled by columns.
- Your Dog, by Yoshitomo Nara (when in atrium) – popular object on our Preschool tours! Locksley/Shea gift.
- First floor atrium opens onto new Art Reference and Research Library, Prints and Drawings Study, Photographs Study, and Friends Community Room/state-of-the-art classroom.
- Outside to view façade of Micheal Graves wing: integration with *Labyrinth* by John Willenbecher (1998), mimics forms found in labyrinth, circles, squares; integrates classical motifs (columns, niches), melds Beaux-Arts McKim with Minimalist Tange.

Conclusion:

How do we relate to and shape the built environment around us? We've looked at the work of three architects – shaping three spaces – in three different eras in time. Think about the initial questions we asked and how your perceptions may have changed: How were the spatial needs of our museum met through the design elements of its building(s)? How did these three architects address those needs?

Other Target Gallery Highlights

- Contemporary paintings and sculpture (including Locksley/Shea loan objects)
- Minnesota Artists Exhibition Program
- Contemporary craft: ceramics, glass, turned wood, metalwork, fiber art, and furniture
- Textiles galleries
- Wells Fargo Modernism collection
- 1948 Tatra automobile (see article in Modernist Design folder in study)
- Our 16th period room: Bauhaus Frankfurt Kitchen – designed for more efficiency and cleanliness within working class housing (article in Modernist Design folder in study)

Fun Facts

- 100,000 objects in the collection: includes about 50,000 works on paper and 10,000 photographs
- Encyclopedic collection, ranging from 20,000 BCE (female “Venus” figure) to present day
- About 4,600 works currently on view
- Almost 400 docents and guides to show you all of our marvels