

GreenDOT Awards

TITLE OF ENTRY: Schad Gallery of Biodiversity, Royal Ontario Museum

Artist/Designer name: Reich+Petch Design International

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Firm Description: Reich+Petch Design International is a Toronto-based multi-disciplinary firm of museum planners, exhibit, interior, graphic and wayfinding designers. Reich+Petch has undertaken projects in over 20 countries and has worked on more than 300 projects in the cultural and attractions field including museums, galleries, exhibits, traveling exhibitions and visitor attractions. The firm currently employs 25 professionals and has a wide network of consultants and suppliers. Reich+Petch's staff is drawn from some of the largest institutions in Canada, which gives them great depth of museological knowledge.

In Canada, the firm has undertaken projects for the Royal Ontario Museum (AAM Awards) and Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, Windsor Art Gallery (2003 OAA Award of Excellence), Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton, Science North in Sudbury, Lake Superior Provincial Park Visitor Centre (2005 ARIDO and 2004 WoodWorks Award), Grimsby Art Gallery and Library, the Portrait Gallery of Canada, Canadian Museum of Nature and the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa. Internationally, the firm has worked on numerous large, new and renovated museums such as Virginia Natural History Museum, Saudi Arabian National Museum Galleries, Hong Kong Heritage Museum, The Lowry Centre in Liverpool (UK Royal Fine Arts Commission Project of the Year 2001); the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County and the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History in Washington D.C. (ARIDO &How Awards).

Name(s) and title(s) of the creators and collaborators of the project.

Design Team: Reich+Petch Design International

Anthony Reich, Principal-in-Charge
Stephen Petri, Design Principal
Ron Flood, Senior Exhibit Designer
Tracy Bright, Senior Exhibit Designer
Edmund Li, Senior Graphic Designer
Pauline Dolovich, Architectural Lead
Fang-Pin Lee, Senior Exhibit Designer
Michelle Parrish, Senior Graphic Designer
Cathy Misiaszek, Interior Designer
Michael Clay, Graphic Designer
Karli McCawley, Project Assistant and Researcher
Eric Tang, Senior Technologist
Jordan Zettel, Technologist

Writers: Royal Ontario Museum Curators

Lighting Designer: Suzanne Powadiuk Design Inc. (Suzanne Powadiuk)

Interpretive Planners: Apropos Planning (Julie Creelman & Lorraine Brown)

Photographer: Karen Carr

Fabricator: MCM 2001 Inc.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT:

In May 2009, the Schad Gallery of Biodiversity, a contemporary intervention in a heritage building, showcasing wondrous specimens and providing a powerful message opened to visitors of all ages at the Royal Ontario Museum with resounding success.

The Schad Gallery of Biodiversity delivers very powerful and relevant messages: Life is Diverse. Life is Inter-related. Life is at Risk. The exhibits and interactive media explore the notion that biodiversity is linked to sustainability while offering optimistic solutions and actions for visitors to adopt.

The exhibition gallery anchors the suite of Life Sciences galleries that extend over the second floor of the Royal Ontario Museum. The new gallery is a multi-layered experience. Innovative and interactive, the gallery combines seven ecosystem experiences, 2,500 specimens and models, two live displays, the Earth Rangers Studio and audiovisual kiosks.

Among the high-tech aspects of the gallery are 12 bilingual interactive touch screens providing over 150 video clips that delve into individual topics in greater detail. The media clips are produced in two languages and are supported with audio voiceovers and captioning. The audiovisual kiosks can be updated periodically, extending the lifespan of the display and offering a fresh visitor experience. An innovative highlight, the Earth Rangers Studio, is a fully equipped broadcast studio, where live animal presentations are held.

During the first week of operation an estimated 20,000 visitors enjoyed the gallery. The gallery has already become a very popular destination with the ROM core audience of multigenerational family groups as illustrated through recent summative evaluation that was supplied by the ROM.

Visitors were very satisfied with the Schad Gallery of Biodiversity, and it clearly has strong appeal for families.

- More than 8-in-10 visitors to the Schad Gallery (84%) had a positive impression of it, and 38% had a “strongly” positive impression. No visitors had a negative impression of it.
- Those visiting with children were more likely to use the interactive technology in the Gallery (i.e., the digital touch screens), and generally provided higher ratings of the Gallery overall.

Best Aspect of ROM Visit

- Visitors were asked which aspect of their entire experience at the ROM they liked: recent visitors (those who had been to the ROM in the past year) were most likely to mention the Schad Gallery (19%). Given the newness of the Schad Gallery, this indicates that frequent or recent visitors appreciate change and/or novelty at the ROM.
- Seven-in-ten visitors spent time in the Schad Gallery of Biodiversity. It clearly appeals to families, as 81% of those visiting with kids under 18 went through the Schad Gallery.

Impressions of the Schad Gallery

- Those visiting with kids under 18 were more likely than those visiting without kids to have a positive impression (95% versus 78%). Further, 52% of those with kids had a “strongly” positive impression.
- Nine-in-ten visitors to the Schad Gallery agreed it was educational (89%) and appropriate for children (89%).
- More than eight-in-ten visitors agreed that the information provided in the Gallery was clear and easy to understand (84%), and well laid out and easy to see (82%).
- Visitors were also likely to agree that the gallery was fun (82%), offered enough hands-on, interactive activities (79%), was well laid out (78%) and easy to find in the ROM (77%).

- There was a near-consensus among visitors that the Schad Gallery contains “about the right amount” of items or specimens on display (88%).
- Most visitors to the Gallery used the digital touch screens (74%), especially those visiting with kids (85%). Further, almost all indicated that the touch screens enhanced their experience in the Gallery (99%), and 63% said it enhance their experience “greatly” (63%).

The Schad Gallery of Biodiversity was designed and executed in 2 ½ years, a very ambitious time frame for a gallery of this size and complexity. The gallery design objectives were: to include as many specimens as possible from the world-class collections, be fabricated of sustainable materials and have bilingual, updateable content. The gallery is visually rich and contemporary, in keeping with the duality of the old and new parts of the Royal Ontario Museum. The designers chose a contemporary approach to facilitate interpretation and allow greater density of display while providing clear circulation routes for visitors.

The central Biodiversity Spine, which runs the length of the gallery, outlines the scientific characteristics that define biodiversity. An overhead illuminated ‘light attic’ with LED internal lighting links the central cases. The specimen mounts resemble scientific apparatus and clean angular plinths support the larger specimens. Sail-like internal divisions, made of PLYBOO, subdivide these extremely large cases and conceal a series of structural columns that run the length of the gallery. They also carry the main signage and are strong enough to support large specimens. Around the gallery perimeter, the Ecosystem Experience cases demonstrate the interconnection of organisms that comprise an ecosystem. Within the case photographic image bands contrast healthy ecosystems with environments destroyed by human activity.

A gallery dedicated to the preservation of biodiversity, by definition has to be ‘green’. Recycled and environmentally sustainable products, low light levels and insect-proof cases protect specimens on display. The materials used in this gallery were from sustainable sources and have low volatile organic compounds (VOC) properties – good for conservation of the specimens as well as the environment. PLYBOO, used inside and outside the cases, is a rapidly renewable resource resembling an exotic hardwood. PAPERSTONE resembling an exotic stone is made of 100% post-consumer recycled office paper and features along the main visitor path. It is the greenest architectural surface on the market. The original heritage building oak parquet flooring was re-finished and re-used. LED lighting is used extensively as it has a longer lamp life, is cooler and draws less power than other lamps, saving money and energy.

Respecting biological sustainability, none of the animals on display were purposely harvested for the making of the gallery. The specimens were either already in the museum collection (e.g. the Dodo skeleton), came from natural deaths at zoos (e.g. the White Rhinoceros), or were bred in captivity for food (e.g. the Bison). The live fish in the coral reef aquarium were ethically collected and took six months to establish in the live coral reef. Skilled model makers reproduced hundreds of fish and plants, replacing real specimens.

The Schad Gallery of Biodiversity tells a big story in a small space. The way in which the visitors experience the extensive natural history collection is inspirational and engages people of all ages in the need to protect our Earth’s species and ecosystems.