

AMFA Architectural Fact Sheet

Project Description

The Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts (AMFA) in Little Rock has undergone a major transformation of its building and grounds in Little Rock. Through revitalizing existing structures and uniting them with a “blossoming” central addition, Studio Gang’s design creates a 133,000-square-foot building that embraces the surrounding city and park and establishes a bold new architectural identity for AMFA. The Museum’s historic 1937 Art Deco façade is returned to its original role as the building’s north entrance. The central addition, with its organic curves and pleated roof, creates a complementary, park-side entrance at the south and establishes a light-filled, connective space that intuitively guides guests into AMFA’s Harriet and Warren Stephens Galleries, Windgate Art School, Performing Arts Theater, Cultural Living Room, Museum Store, and restaurant. The design also treats architecture and landscape as intrinsically linked. SCAPE’s 11-acre landscape extends the Museum experience into the park, bringing a biodiverse array of new plantings that provide shade and beauty for indoor/outdoor social spaces, as well as new paths that allow the public to enjoy nature and view outdoor sculptures.

Location

501 East Ninth Street, Little Rock, Arkansas 72202.
AMFA is in the heart of downtown’s historic MacArthur Park.

Leadership

Harriet Stephens, Capital Campaign Co-Chair, Building Committee Chair, Director on AMFA Foundation Board of Directors.

Warren Stephens, Capital Campaign Co-Chair and Chair of AMFA Foundation Board of Directors.

Van Tilbury, Chair, AMFA Board of Trustees.

Dr. Victoria Ramirez, Executive Director, AMFA.

Design Architect & Architect of Record

Studio Gang, Chicago.

Landscape Architect

SCAPE, New York City.

Associate Architect

Polk Stanley Wilcox Architects, Little Rock.

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Project Cost

In January 2021, the capital campaign supporting this project, Reimagining the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts, established a fundraising goal of \$142 million. Campaign funds support hard and soft construction costs, museum operating support, and strengthening AMFA Foundation's endowment. As of January 2021, the campaign had raised \$136 million. In September 2022, the campaign exceeded the original goal and raised \$150.4 million. A new and final fundraising goal of \$155 million was announced.

Project Timeline

- 2016: Studio Gang selected as Design Architect and Architect of Record.
- 2017: SCAPE selected as Landscape Architect and Polk Stanley Wilcox Architects selected as Associate Architect.
- Feb. 2018: Designs unveiled to the public.
- Oct. 2019: Groundbreaking ceremony.
- Jan. 2021: Arkansas Arts Center changes name to Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts.
- April 2023: Public opening of AMFA.

Key Building Features

Studio Gang's design establishes and clarifies connections between the Harriet and Warren Stephens Galleries, Windgate Art School, Performing Arts Theater, Governor Winthrop Rockefeller Lecture Hall, Museum Store, Cultural Living Room, and restaurant, as well as indoor and outdoor public gathering spaces for AMFA's guests.

Harriet and Warren Stephens Galleries

AMFA's 14,000-object international collection is showcased in an elegant new 20,000-SF gallery wing with 15.5-foot ceilings. The Museum's permanent collection and temporary exhibitions each have dedicated galleries, while additional spaces such as the new media gallery and the Art Perch expand AMFA's ability to display time-based and large-scale forms of art.

The Art Perch, a large window in the northernmost gallery with built-in seating, gives arriving guests a framed "sneak peek" of featured artworks displayed inside. Within the gallery, the window provides a vibrant view of the outdoor landscape and a comfortable place to rest and view the art.

AMFA's new media gallery is a flexible gallery space with the potential to display audio-visual works designed for projectors, television monitors, speakers, and even interactive digital platforms, allowing AMFA's programming to reflect the myriad ways artists work in the 21st century. AMFA's dedicated new media gallery presents artworks created with video, computer animation, and interactive digital art. These works are shown on a continuous loop and guests are invited to visit the gallery anytime.

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Terri and Chuck Erwin Collections Research Center

Fully equipped with audio and visual capabilities, this 1,670-SF room with warm walnut paneling is designed for formal meetings and presentations, study of the collection, and other scholarly activities and gatherings in need of quieter, more intimate settings. It is also available for hosting private events and includes access to an attached kitchenette and private restroom.

Windgate Art School

The 11,000-SF school boasts multiple studios for students of all ages and skillsets with a faculty comprised of working artists in drawing, painting, ceramics, glass, metals, woodworking, printmaking, and more. Additional spaces include the Robyn and John Horn Gallery, which features a roster of temporary exhibitions; dedicated studios for artists-in-residence, and an Art Lawn for outdoor classes and activities.

Performing Arts Theater

The 350-seat Performing Arts Theater restores many of its unique 1960s design elements while incorporating state-of-the-art lighting, sound, and back-of-house capabilities for presenting touring stage productions, film screenings, concerts, and more. New, slatted wood paneling on the walls improves the space's acoustics and brings natural warmth.

Governor Winthrop Rockefeller Lecture Hall

AMFA's lecture hall seats 153 and serves as a mid-size capacity venue for formal presentations, lectures, guest speakers, and more. Renewed to look and function as a complementary space to the Performing Arts Theater, the hall is designed with state-of-the-art acoustics and audio and visual capabilities.

Cultural Living Room

The Cultural Living Room is AMFA's signature community space—a place to relax and socialize equipped with comfortable lounge furniture and a coffee and cocktail bar. Its flexible 5,860 SF doubles as a venue for AMFA hosted events or private functions, complete with direct access to AMFA's catering kitchen and panoramic views of the 1937 façade and Courtyard, Crescent Lawn, and MacArthur Park neighborhood.

Restaurant

AMFA's new 2,800-SF full-service restaurant has indoor seating and a covered outdoor dining terrace, and a private dining room. Its dramatic, full-height windows offer immersive views of the new landscape and MacArthur Park.

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Glass Box and Terrace

This 2,640-SF space is totally transformed into a naturally lit, multi-purpose venue with high-end audio and visual capabilities and a private terrace that connects to AMFA's south grounds, Event Lawn, and MacArthur Park. In addition to private events, this space will be used for visual and performing arts programs.

1937 Lobby

Located inside the original walls of the 1937 Museum of Fine Arts, AMFA's new 1,500-SF Lobby has walnut paneled walls and three sets of tall glass doors and windows that open views all the way to the second-floor Mezzanine, echoing the grand proportions and materiality of the original 1937 lobby. An information desk welcomes guests, provides program information, and offers coat check services during formal events.

Design Highlights

The signature design gesture of the transformed AMFA is its central addition, an organically curving, naturally lit connective space that links the 1937 Entrance to the north with the new Park Entrance to the south. Its 5,270-SF triple-height Atrium allows for a seamless flow of people and art through the museum, distinguishing each of AMFA's key areas of programming and intuitively guiding guests between the spaces. A Grand Staircase provides a gracious connection with the second-floor galleries and Cultural Living Room. From its balcony overlook, guests can see into the Windgate Art School and Museum Store, as well as through the restaurant to the new dining terrace and gardens outside.

The central addition's distinctive, "blossoming" roof is an innovative, folded-plate structure made of cast-in-place concrete that spans the entire length of the building from north to south. Stepping down in height with the site's topography, its clerestory windows fill the interior of the museum with natural light, while its sheltering overhangs protect from the heat of the sun.

The ceiling and floor of the Atrium emphasize the addition's flowing, organic lines and celebrate natural materials. Entering the building, guests look up to see the dynamic wood ceiling, whose sweeping curves and undulating surface are made up of individually-suspended wood slats hung in a linear pattern. The polished concrete floor echoes the lines of the ceiling with its curving bands of large and small stone aggregate, which lead guests into the adjacent spaces that branch off from the Atrium.

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The Courtyard Entrance on the building's north end, which faces Crescent Drive and Ninth Street, serves as AMFA's formal entrance and provides a grand entry experience with its impressive height and scale. Arriving guests pass below the elevated Cultural Living Room and cross the 1937 Courtyard anchored by Henry Moore's bronze sculpture *Large Standing Figure: Knife Edge*, entering the building through its historic Art Deco limestone façade, now returned to its original stature as the face of the museum. Inside, the 1937 Lobby provides a welcoming orientation point.

The Park Entrance on the building's south end faces MacArthur Park. At this end, the blossoming roof steps down gracefully to meet arriving guests, extending into deep overhangs that shade the entrance and the dining terrace of the new indoor/outdoor restaurant. Whether outside or inside, guests can take in stunning views of AMFA's new landscape, which includes more than 50 species of perennials, shrubs, native plants, and ornamental grasses.

Landscape Highlights

SCAPE's 11-acre landscape plan features 2,200 linear feet of new walking paths, outdoor sculpture, and curving, sculptural benches that connect the architecture and landscape throughout the northern and southern entrance plazas.

The Event Lawn is an open green space framed by walking paths and newly landscaped native plants and trees. With MacArthur Park as a backdrop, this 5,100-SF lawn located just off the restaurant is designed for hosting AMFA programs and activities or special events.

Just off the Park Entrance, the restaurant's terrace echoes the roof's shape and is surrounded by "petal" gardens that boast seasonal flora planted among regionally quarried sandstone.

Planted groves along the west side of the building create a forested edge that blends outward into the park, while 250 new trees have been incorporated with existing mature trees to create, in time, a single canopy.

Crescent Lawn, a 10,000-SF public area along Ninth Street, features arcing paths that invite the public into a lush and welcoming north entrance embedded within the park. The landscape restoration plan preserves the park's iconic oak trees and reintroduces magnolia groves and native plantings.

Sustainability Features

Adaptive Reuse: To minimize the project's carbon footprint, the design reuses as much of the existing campus and materials as possible. This includes reusing some of the most carbon-intensive elements of the existing building: the original structure and foundations, which are made of concrete and steel, as well as masonry, precast concrete, and metal facades.

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Self-Shading: The roof's deep overhangs shade the interior, reducing solar heat gain and glare, as well as reducing energy use for mechanical cooling. The deepest overhangs are at the south end of the building, where the sun is most direct—these overhangs also provide a comfortable, shaded environment for outdoor dining.

Radiant Heating and Cooling: A highly efficient radiant heating and cooling system, which is embedded in the museum's concrete floor slabs, further reduces the building's energy use.

Water Efficiency and Reuse: A unique rainwater management system, coupled with the use of native and adaptive plantings, reduces the site's demand on the municipal water system. At the building's southern end, the roof's folded profile directs rainwater to rain gardens in and around the restaurant terrace. These rain gardens capture and filter the water before distributing it throughout the MacArthur Park landscape and into Foster Pond, naturally absorbing the rain and lessening pressure on the city's infrastructure.

Improved Soil Quality and Biodiversity: The project improves soil quality throughout the site by adding nutrients to help support a fertile growing environment for the new, native and adaptive landscape.

Certified LEED Silver: Combined, the project's green strategies allowed it to achieve LEED Silver certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

Principal Project Funders

AMFA is being realized through a capital campaign that includes a \$31,245,000 contribution from the City of Little Rock, generated through a hotel tax revenue bond. Overwhelming private support has more than quadrupled this public contribution to the project. Lead donors include Windgate Foundation, Harriet and Warren Stephens, Terri and Chuck Erwin, the State of Arkansas, and Winthrop Rockefeller Charitable Trust.

Project Team

Studio Gang

Jeanne Gang, Founding Principal and Partner.

Juliane Wolf, Design Principal and Partner.

Margaret Cavenagh, Design Principal, Interiors.

Angela Peckham, Senior Project Leader.

Design Team: Paige Adams, Jill Doran, Emily Licht, AJ Rosales, Stanley Schultz,

David Swain, Rolf Temesvari, Peter Yi, and Wen Zhou.

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SCAPE

Kate Orff, Founding Principal and Partner.

Gena Wirth, Design Principal and Partner.

John Donnelly, Technical Principal and Partner.

Chris Barnes, Project Manager and Landscape Architect.

Tanner Perrin, Deputy Project Manager and Landscape Architect.

Polk Stanley Wilcox

David Porter, Principal and CEO.

Cindy Pruitt, Principal.

Design Team: Wendell Kinzler, Laura Hendrix, Dian Bartlett, and Kate Edwards.

Additional Team

Nabholz, Pepper, Doyne, Construction Manager/General Contractor.

Thornton Tomasetti, Structural Engineer and Enclosure Consultant.

McClelland Consulting Engineers, Civil Engineer.

dbHMS, MEP/FP Engineer.

Arup, Acoustical, Theatrical, and AV Designer.

Venue Consulting, Cost Estimator.

Licht Kunst Licht, Lighting Designer.

Brownlee and Mann Consulting.

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