

CANADIAN

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ARCHITECT

2010 AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE



BRIAN C. NEVIN WELCOME CENTER, CORNELL PLANTATIONS



ARCHITECT BAIRD SAMPSON NEUERT ARCHITECTS
LOCATION CORNELL UNIVERSITY, ITHACA, NEW YORK

Sited within Cornell University's botanical garden, the Welcome Center and related site improvements provide integrated visitor and educational experiences that advance the identity of Plantations as a "green" garden. A new organizational framework was developed for the overall garden that reinforces the primacy of the existing topography, vegetated states, and resulting spatial conditions. This framework establishes an armature that interconnects existing formal and naturalized garden systems, and anticipates ongoing garden development.

The components of this Stage 1 project consist of a 6,000-square-foot visitor services and education center, parking facility, fire access route, and stormwater bioswale. These components emerged through an extended facility and garden planning effort undertaken at the outset of the project.

This compact botanical garden possesses an extraordinary topography. The southern edge of the site is defined by an expansive "bowl," and a glacial "knoll" defines its northern edge. Both of these landforms are planted with naturalized vegetation and are criss-crossed by a series of curvilinear pathways that negotiate steep grades. Flatland extends between these two naturalized landforms, and contains a geometric patchwork of plots, formal

gardens and a surface parking lot which currently occupies the central region of the site.

Conceived as a pavilion that forms an integral part of the garden experience, the Center is sited deep within the garden at the transition between flatland and knoll where a series of existing pathways converge. Organized into two levels that respond to these two topographic conditions, the lower level of the Center forms an active terrace that accommodates visitor service needs. Educational and events programming are located on the upper level within a flexible multipurpose space. Both levels are organized to connect with outdoor terraces that facilitate programmatic and spatial extensions between architectural and landscape environments.

Parking facilities are relocated to the periphery of the site adjacent to established planting. Organized in response to the curved landform of the surrounding bowl, the new parking lot and arrival terrace engage pedestrian linkages from the main campus, and consolidate systems for visitors arriving by foot, bicycle, car, tour bus and public transit. This common point of arrival promotes visitor orientation and interpretation of the facility's objectives, and directs visitors along a new route that extends between arrival terrace, the Welcome Center and the adjoining campus community.

The legible passage of water across the site, the expression of its containment and on-site use, the dependence of plants and people on water—all



CLIENT PLANTATIONS BOTANICAL GARDEN, CORNELL UNIVERSITY
ARCHITECT TEAM JON NEUERT, YVES BONNARDEAUX, HARVEY WU, ANDREA MACECEK, TEDDY BENEDICTO, WINDA LAU, CYRIL CHARRON, HUGH CLARK, JESSE DORMODY
STRUCTURAL BLACKWELL BOWICK ENGINEERING
MECHANICAL/ELECTRICAL M&E ENGINEERING
CIVIL TG MILLER ENGINEERING
LANDSCAPE HALVORSEN DESIGN PARTNERSHIP
SUSTAINABILITY/LEED CONSULTANT BAIRD SAMPPSON NEUERT ARCHITECTS
AREA 6,000 FT² + 3.2 ACRES SITEWORK
BUDGET \$5.5 M INCLUDING SITEWORK AND SERVICING
COMPLETION JANUARY 2011

provides a thematic framework that extends through the site, linking new and existing gardens, landscape and architectural environments, advancing the project's educational objectives and green garden mandate.

Building materials are used in an elemental manner to advance the idea of an interior topography. Stone is deployed to engage, manipulate and retain the ground plane, and extends the system of dry-laid garden walls used extensively throughout the site. Wood is deployed as an overhead element that provides shelter and modulates light. An expansive ipe louvre extends across the southern face of the building, unifying the façade of the building while providing passive solar shading for the south-facing glazing.

Opaque portions of exterior wood walls and roof are super-insulated using spray foam insulation. A rooftop solar thermal system is connected to an in-floor radiant heating system, supplying 80% of the building's heating needs. Operating systems are designed to achieve an overall 49% energy reduction, addressing all energy optimization credits within the LEED rating system, exceeding current Architecture 2030 Challenge benchmarks.

JC: This beautiful facility is a highly sophisticated and sensitive insertion into an existing university botanical garden by an architect in full control of his craft. The finely resolved building with simple materials, mediating between a knoll and the flatland, is also highly environmentally responsive.

AK: This project represents excellence and the sublime, in that the sublime context is a mixed blessing. The Welcome Center is located in a place of beauty and its job is to curate our experience of that place in a variety of ways. It must somehow find a presence within this beauty without undermining it. It would, at best, do all this and function as a meaningful public amenity; it exceeds the highest of these expectations. Through architecture, it evidences how truly meaningful the landscape/architecture construct can be. The Welcome Center relates to the landscape in myriad ways. As an object, it emerges from, nestles within, frames and defines views to the landscape. As a curatorial device, it discusses the history, potential and ecological systems of the site. As a spatial construct, it beautifully moves one through spaces and sequences that heighten one's understanding of the building, and of the world the building inhabits. This project achieves the highest aspirations of architecture by moving beyond it.

JL: This project represents such a successful architectural act of honouring a landscape precisely by the surgical insertion of a beautifully scaled and articulated building without in any way deferring to the natural elements. There isn't one false note or cloying move. In addition, this is one of the submissions where every drawing, diagram and image serves to illuminate an intention.

OPPOSITE TOP A RENDERING ILLUSTRATING THE VIEW FROM THE BOTANICAL GARDENS TO THE ENTRY COURT AND EXTERIOR CAFÉ. **TOP RIGHT** THE EXHIBITION HALL LEADING TOWARDS THE ENTRY COURT. **ABOVE RIGHT** THE ENTRANCE VESTIBULE AND GIFT SHOP IN THE EXHIBITION HALL.

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| 1 VEHICLE ENTRANCE/EXIT | 10 ROADWAY AND PEDESTRIAN PATH | 19 YOUNG FLOWER GARDEN |
| 2 ARRIVAL PLAZA | 11 ENTRY COURT | 20 MULLESTEIN WINTER GARDEN |
| 3 URBAN FOREST | 12 SEASONAL TERRACE | 21 GARDENS |
| 4 RAIN GARDEN WALKWAY AND PEDESTRIAN BRIDGES | 13 WELCOME CENTER | 22 EVENT LAWN |
| 5 RAIN GARDEN/BIOSWALE | 14 KNOLL PLATEAU | 23 TREE GROVE |
| 6 NEW STORMWATER OUTFALL | 15 PAVILION | 24 POUNDER HERITAGE VEGETABLE GARDEN |
| 7 PATHWAY | 16 LEWIS BUILDING | 25 MCCLINTOCK SHED |
| 8 ROCK GARDEN/ALPINE PLANTS | 17 CONTAINER GARDEN | 26 BEEBE LAKE |
| 9 TRANSITIONAL GARDEN | 18 ROBISON YORK HERB GARDEN | |



SITE PLAN CONCEPT

