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OKRA
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NIP PAYSAGE

A landscape photograph of the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens Visitor Center. The foreground is dominated by tall, golden-brown grasses with green blades at the base. To the left, a dark grey gravel path runs parallel to a concrete curb. In the background, a large, leafy green tree stands against a cloudy sky. A small, modern building with a grey roof is visible in the distance, partially obscured by the grass.

BROOKLYN
BOTANICAL GARDENS
VISITOR CENTER
HM WHITE



BROOKLYN BOTANICAL GARDENS VISITOR CENTER HM WHITE



Honored by the NYC Design Commission with an Award for Excellence in Design in 2008 for integration of form, function and sustainable practice, the new visitor center to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden establishes a visionary public interface between the city and the garden. The design is conceived as a seamless, inhabitable extension of the Garden—merging landscape and architecture and redefining physical and philosophical relationships between visitor and garden, exhibition and movement, culture and cultivation.

SITE CONTEXT

At the northeastern perimeter of the 52-acre botanic garden, between the Brooklyn Museum and the Japanese Hill-and-Pond Garden, a 25-foot high berm crested by a mature allée of Ginkgo trees forms the edge of the Garden and the spine of the Visitor Center project. The berm is a remnant of the original, uncompleted design for the Brooklyn Museum and contains contaminated soils from the property's former use as an urban ash dump in the late 1800s.

Fusing contemporary site engineering technology with sustainable design and horticulture, the new visitor center marks the Garden's centennial and demonstrates the institution's commitment to conservation by providing a new pedagogical paradigm and exhibit for its next 100 years of public service.

SITE DESIGN

The three-acre site design greets visitors with a large plaza at Washington Avenue and features an elegant building designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects emerging from the landscape and forming the Garden's entrance gateway. The high-performance

building houses visitor information, ticket and retail services as well as education, exhibition and event spaces.

The complex is cinematically revealed in the landscape as an unfolding procession never fully visible at once, framing a series of views into and over the gardens. The landscape design molds the landform to highlight the berm's topographic dominance and extend the terrain over the building with a vegetated green roof to develop a distinct verdant backdrop. Grade transitions physically integrate the building into the landform, extend pathways above, around and through the building and merge exterior social spaces with a system of depressions to collect, filter and infiltrate storm water runoff.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

A network of storm water collection features incorporates an extensive green roof, storm water channel, vegetated swales and bioinfiltration basins. Collectively, these elements retain storm water onsite to facilitate natural filtration and ground water recharge and eliminate need for costly subsurface water detention facilities or discharge to the municipal sewer. Water quality is improved through filtration, sedimentation and biological processes.

SOIL RECLAMATION

Contaminated soils in the historic fill demand remedial action. While some contaminated soils will remain capped, distinct soil profiles were designed to reconstruct existing soils and restore viable soil biology to support diverse horticultural conditions. The loose deep soils of the bioinfiltration basins were designed to absorb water and filter pollutants. Expanding the volume of potential storm water capture,



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structural soils were created to also provide contiguous soil volumes supportive of tree root growth under paved areas.

HORTICULTURAL EXHIBIT

The planting design preserves and showcases the existing Ginkgo Allée and integrates an iconic botanic exhibit that demonstrates how plants have an ecological role in how a landscape functions and performs. Informed by native plant communities, botanic collections are organized in bold drifts, from upland to lowland typologies, to knit the visitor center landscape into the existing Garden and establish a resilient design structure for future garden expansion.



The plant palette features trees, shrubs and meadows that withstand and thrive through periods of drought and inundation. This riparian community demands minimal water provisions for long-term sustainability which significantly reduces need for permanent irrigation systems.

The Visitor Center opened on May 16, 2012





Architect: Weiss/Manfredi
 Civil and Structural Engineers: Weidinger Associates
 MEP: Jaros, Baum & Bolles Consulting Engineers
 Landscape: HM White
 Lighting: Brandston Partnership
 Sustainability: Viridian Energy and Environmental
 AV/Acoustic/Security: Cerami & Associates
 Cost Estimator: AMIS Inc.
 Geothermal/Geotechnical: Langan Engineering & Environmental
 Photographs: Aaron Booher



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