



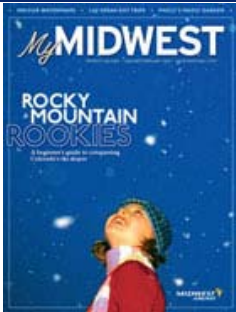


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## A Grand Design

*An in-depth look at Grand Rapids' new art museum*

By Barbara E. Cohen

PHOTO BY DANIEL E. JOHNSON/GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN



Billed as both art- and earth-friendly, the new Grand Rapids Art Museum in Michigan—which opened to the public Oct. 5—incorporates energy-efficient lighting, heating and cooling systems, as well as water and wastepaper recycling systems in its pursuit of LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification. While more than 700 buildings in America have earned the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED rating, no other purpose-built museum has met the challenge. GRAM aims to be the first.

### ART LEED-ER



It's no easy feat to build an art museum that meets the U.S. Green Building Council's criteria for a gold rating, and few art institutions have accomplished any LEED accreditation at all. In 2006 Massachusetts' Provincetown Art Association and Museum did achieve a silver rating for its 9,000-square-foot addition, but at 125,000 square feet, the GRAM is significantly larger and its goal more all-encompassing.

The challenge for architect Kulapat Yantrasast, partner of the Los Angeles-based Workshop Hakomori Yantrasast, was to create a design solution that made sense.

"It's difficult for an art museum to be as earth-friendly as an office building because museums must maintain a temperature between 70 and 72 degrees, with about 50 percent humidity, to keep the artwork at its best," says Celeste Adams, GRAM's executive director. "The solution is usually a sealed box with air conditioning constantly flowing."



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Every decision for the new building, which took six years and \$75 million to complete, involved an examination of its environmental consequences.

### GREENING GRAND RAPIDS



The decision to build an environmentally responsible building started with a \$20 million gift to the museum from the Peter M. Wege Foundation. Wege is the lead donor and a long-time environmental advocate who also led the 1968 fund-raising campaign for Grand Rapids' La Grand Vitesse, Alexander Calder's monumental sculpture that was once controversial but is now so integral to the city's identity that it appears on its logo.

Wege's gift to GRAM came with a mandate to build green, specifically to build the first art museum in the world in which the entire facility is LEED certified.

His stipulation made sense in Grand Rapids, a city with a strong reputation for environmental friendliness. According to the U.S. Green Building Council, Grand Rapids ranks No. 5 in the United States for the number of LEED-certified projects, including the David D. Hunting YMCA, which opened in 2005 as the first LEED-certified YMCA in the country. Grand Rapids, in other words, is fertile ground for groundbreaking environmental design.

### SEEING GREEN

Most of the building's green elements are tucked into the building without calling attention to themselves.

During the construction phase, builders used at least 10 percent recycled materials, and 20 percent of all materials used were obtained from local sources. Wood products were acquired from Forest Service Council-certified lumberyards and building crews recycled construction waste.

In the finished building, fresh air is filtered and incorporated with conditioned air to maintain a constant temperature and humidity with the least energy use; electrical lighting augments natural lighting, which can be controlled through skylight louvers; rainwater is recycled and used for flushing toilets, plant irrigation and a fountain; and the insulation system incorporates light-colored concrete walls, three-layered UV filter glass, insulating Argon gas between glass window panels and low-emission coatings on all building surfaces. In the future, a strict recycling policy and the use of green housecleaning methods will decrease the building's day-to-day environmental impact.

"Grand Rapids has a legacy of art in public spaces, so the new Grand Rapids Art Museum was built to be a destination for the public to gather," Adams says. "But [it was also designed] to tell the city's story and convey its leadership in environmental sustainability."

From its recycled-water toilets to the lanterns that light up the skyline at night, the GRAM is a perfect complement to the city's public art and environmental efforts.

### What is LEED?

According to the U.S. Green Building Council ([www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org)), LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification is a nationally accepted green building rating that works as a benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high-performance green buildings. The certification also provides third-party verification that a building project is environmentally responsible and a physically healthy place to work.

### IF YOU GO



The Grand Rapids Art Museum is located at 101 Monroe Center. Open Tuesday-Thursday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Friday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. Closed Mondays.

Admission is free for members, \$8 adults, \$7 seniors (62 and older) and college students (with ID), \$5 youths (ages 6-17) and free for children younger than 6. The museum's café is open daily 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information, call 616-831-1000 or visit [gramonline.org](http://gramonline.org).

The museum is within walking distance of the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, JW Marriott Grand Rapids and Courtyard by Marriott Grand Rapids Downtown. Other venues within walking distance include the Gerald R. Ford Museum, the Van Andel Museum Center of the Public Museum and the Grand Rapids Children's Museum. A walking tour of public sculpture and architecture in downtown Grand Rapids (brochure available at hotels or from the nearby Grand Rapids/Kent County Convention and Visitors Bureau or visit [sculpturesitesgr.org](http://sculpturesitesgr.org)) takes you past more than 50 points of interest.

### Fish gotta swim, art gotta fly

### FUNCTION MEETS FORM AT FISH LADDER PARK



Downtown Grand Rapids' Riverwalk Pathways takes you

past some of the city's most prominent historic sites, museums and cultural districts—and to some of the city's best vistas along its namesake Grand River.

One of the best spots is Fish Ladder Park, the site of a concrete environmental sculpture by Joseph Kinnebrew IV. Since 1974, Grand River Sculpture and Fish Ladder has provided a popular viewing platform for people to watch as salmon and steelhead circumvent the Grand River rapids on their way to spawning grounds upriver.

“The Fish Ladder, when it was first conceived and even now, challenges our perception of what art can or should be,” says Kinnebrew, a graduate of Michigan State University now residing outside of Seattle. “I’m gratified to know that after so many years, visitors to this environmental sculpture find it relevant and perhaps enlightening when they consider the mysterious cycle of the anadromous fish and the role of monuments and societal artifacts.”

The five-level “ladder” helps migratory fish navigate upstream past a six-foot-high dam while it celebrates Grand Rapids as a city in which public art is as natural as the river that flows through it.

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