

Program Summary:

A major riverfront aquarium renovation blends design innovation and community engagement through the relocation of the Insectarium and a reimagined entry and exhibit flow.

Program Statement:

In 2015, a prominent cultural institution launched a major effort to breathe new life into one of its longstanding assets—a riverfront aquarium—by relocating its companion insect exhibit from a nearby historic building and undertaking a comprehensive renovation. For the first time, these two vital community offerings were housed under one roof. The renovation introduced a crystalline-configured entry to define the relocated main lobby and ticketing area, along with a new grand stair and glass bridge. The scope also included the transformation of the Mississippi River Gallery into a bayou experience, a refreshed Amazon Exhibit Gallery, the addition of a new Top-of-Gulf tank, two gift shops, and a complete reversal of the exhibit flow to enhance the visitor journey throughout the aquarium. This revitalized civic amenity, located in the heart of downtown New Orleans near the Mississippi River and French Quarter, joins a series of recent urban renewal projects in the area, including a reimagined ferry terminal, a renovated public plaza, and a newly developed hotel and residential tower. The project fuses design innovation with community engagement, creating an enriched experience for visitors of all ages and reaffirming the institution's presence along the riverfront.

A100.01

Building Area: (sf)
181,835 SF

Cost per Square Foot:
\$142/SF

Construction Cost
\$26M

Date of Completion:
May 2023



A100.02

Crystalline Entry Feature

In 2015, a major organization began revitalizing a longstanding riverfront destination, relocating its Insectarium from the historic Customs House and undertaking a significant expansion and renovation of the Aquarium.



A100.03

A New Chapter on the Riverfront

Critically changing the face of New Orleans' downtown with its evolution over the years, the facility has generated some of the most prominent waterfront access the city has seen.

The new Aquarium and Insectarium adds to the effort to provide new experiences on the Mississippi riverfront, reinvigorating the end of Canal Street as a major visitor destination.

A100.04

Sourcing Inspiration from Nature

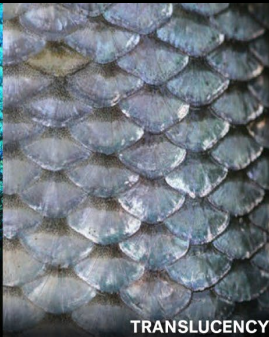
Drawing inspiration from the residents within the Aquarium and Insectarium, the design team's use of naturally-occurring patterns, shapes, and colorways of animals alongside the dramatic crystal entry feature serves as a clear signal for single-entry to both Aquarium and newly relocated Insectarium.



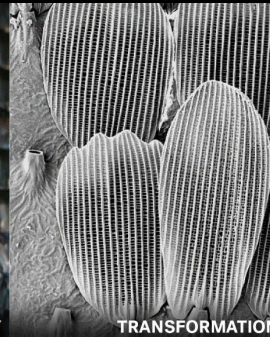
IRIDESCENCE



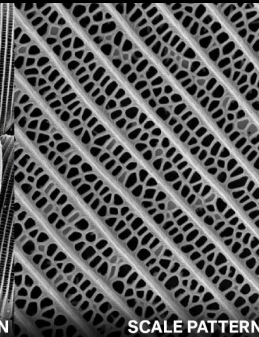
LIGHT REFRACTION



TRANSLUCENCY

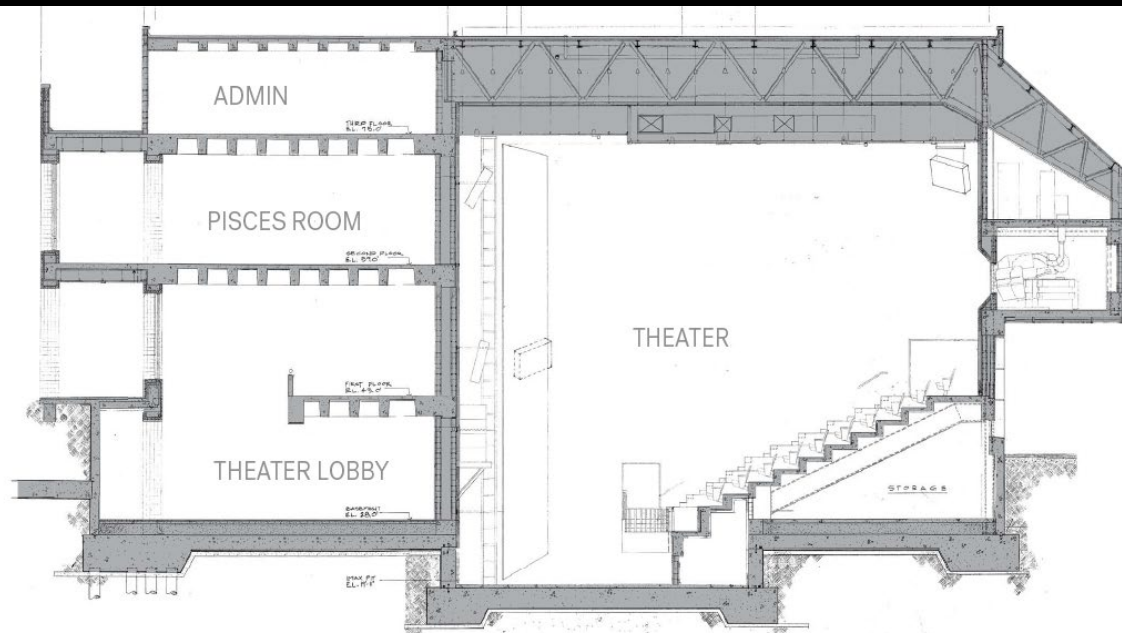


TRANSFORMATION

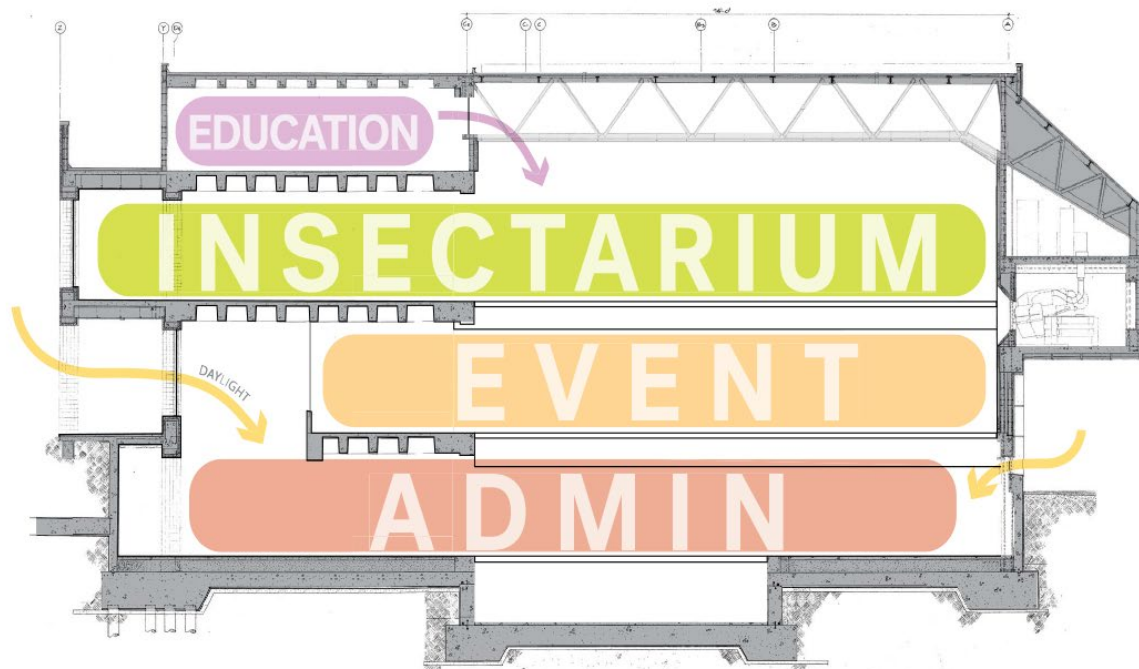


SCALE PATTERN

Before



After

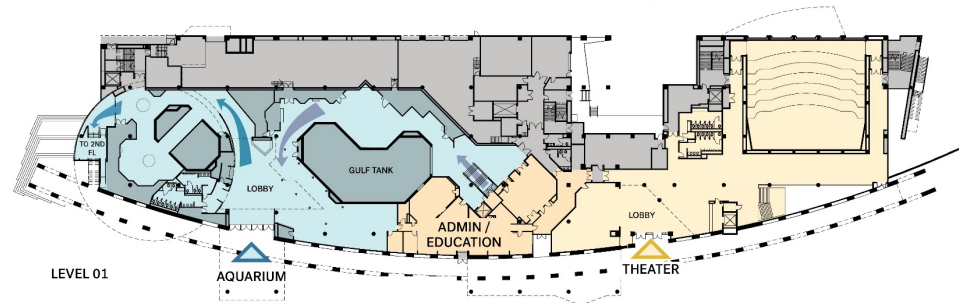
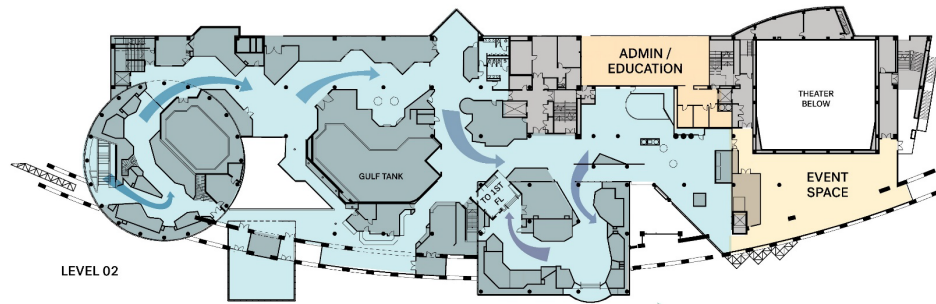


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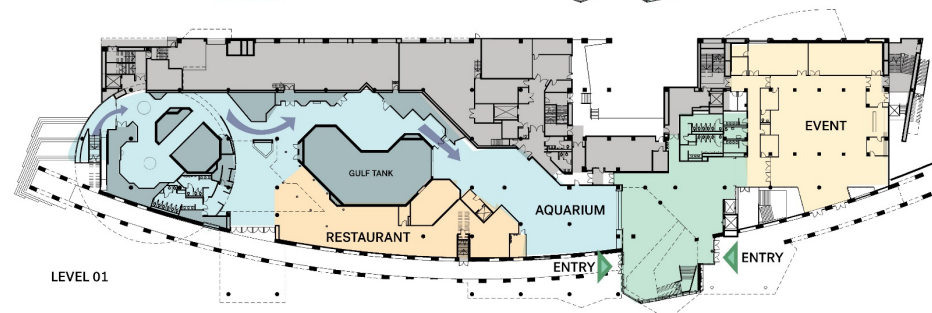
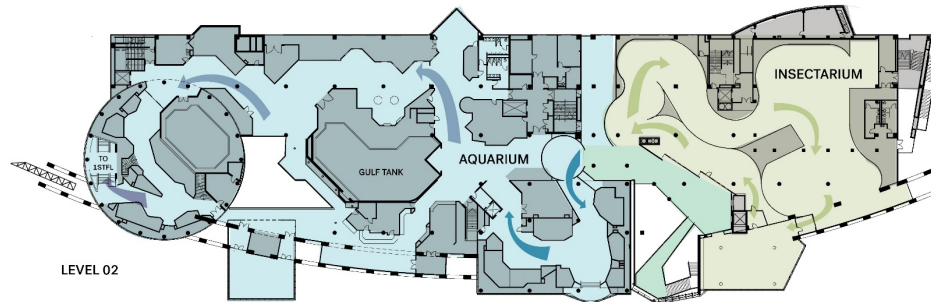
Shifting Things Around

Recognizing the considerable footprint of the theatre, and a dwindling need for certain programming, the previous giant screen theater was decanted, shifting space on each floor for independent program needs for the Insectarium, in tandem with event, administration, and education space.

Before



After



A100.06

Updated Visitor Flow

The reversal of visitor flow through the exhibits helped standardize the departure point from the new shared lobby and ticketing area.



A100.07

Revitalized Lobby

Today, the updated entrance for the combined aquarium and insectarium serves as an un-ticketed, revitalized first impression for visitors and a physical embodiment of the organization's stewardship mission.



A100.08

Transformed Entry Sequence

As the initial and culminating experience in the visitor journey, the new lobby serves as a liminal space between Audubon and the world beyond—a chance to both introduce guests to the splendor of the nature and inform them of their stewardship duties upon re-entering the “real world.”



Before



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Catwalk

A translucent, suspended catwalk divides the double-height space, providing dramatic views to the river and an opportunity to engage the grandeur of the lobby space from all directions.



A100.10

Butterfly Garden Overlooking the River

The new exhibit space for the Insectarium consists of 17,000 SF of interactive exhibits, immersive displays, and a riverfront butterfly garden overlooking both the adjoining lobby and Mississippi River.



A100.11

Butterfly Garden Overlooking
the River



A100.12

Insectarium Programming

Highlights of the Insectarium experience include an immersive and interactive electronic firefly and butterfly "wow wall," live exhibits enhanced with sound and light, and an all-new Bug Appetite Cafe where visitors can actually order insect delicacies.





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View Along the Riverfront