

Program Summary:

Inspired by waves, the two forms converge at a public corridor connecting the lake with the nature center and children's museum, creating a unified destination.

Program Statement:

This project unites two institutions that had never previously coexisted, a nature center and a children's museum, bringing together their shared mission of fostering community, culture, and discovery. Rooted in education and engagement, the design creates a destination where environmental awareness and imaginative learning converge into a single, cohesive experience for visitors of all ages.

Its significance for the city is profound. The project serves as the new home for a beloved children's museum that was severely damaged and closed following a series of devastating hurricanes. Reestablishing this institution became both a civic priority and an opportunity to reimagine its role within the community, providing resilience, renewal, and a renewed sense of place.

Architecturally, the building expresses the concept of connection. The form and program are organized as two distinct entities that reach toward one another, converging at a vibrant central lobby that serves as a shared public way. Echoing the gentle waves of the lake, the expressive roof becomes the project's defining feature—an iconic gesture that symbolizes this union while creating a dynamic and recognizable presence.

The site further amplifies the project's impact. Positioned as an anchor along a new waterfront development encircling the lake, the museum establishes an inviting and energetic edge to the city. It contributes to a broader public realm, welcoming residents and visitors alike to engage with the waterfront and the life of the city.

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Building Area: (sf)
25,290

Cost per Square Foot:
\$724.78

Construction Cost
\$18,329,817.36

Date of Completion:
March 2025



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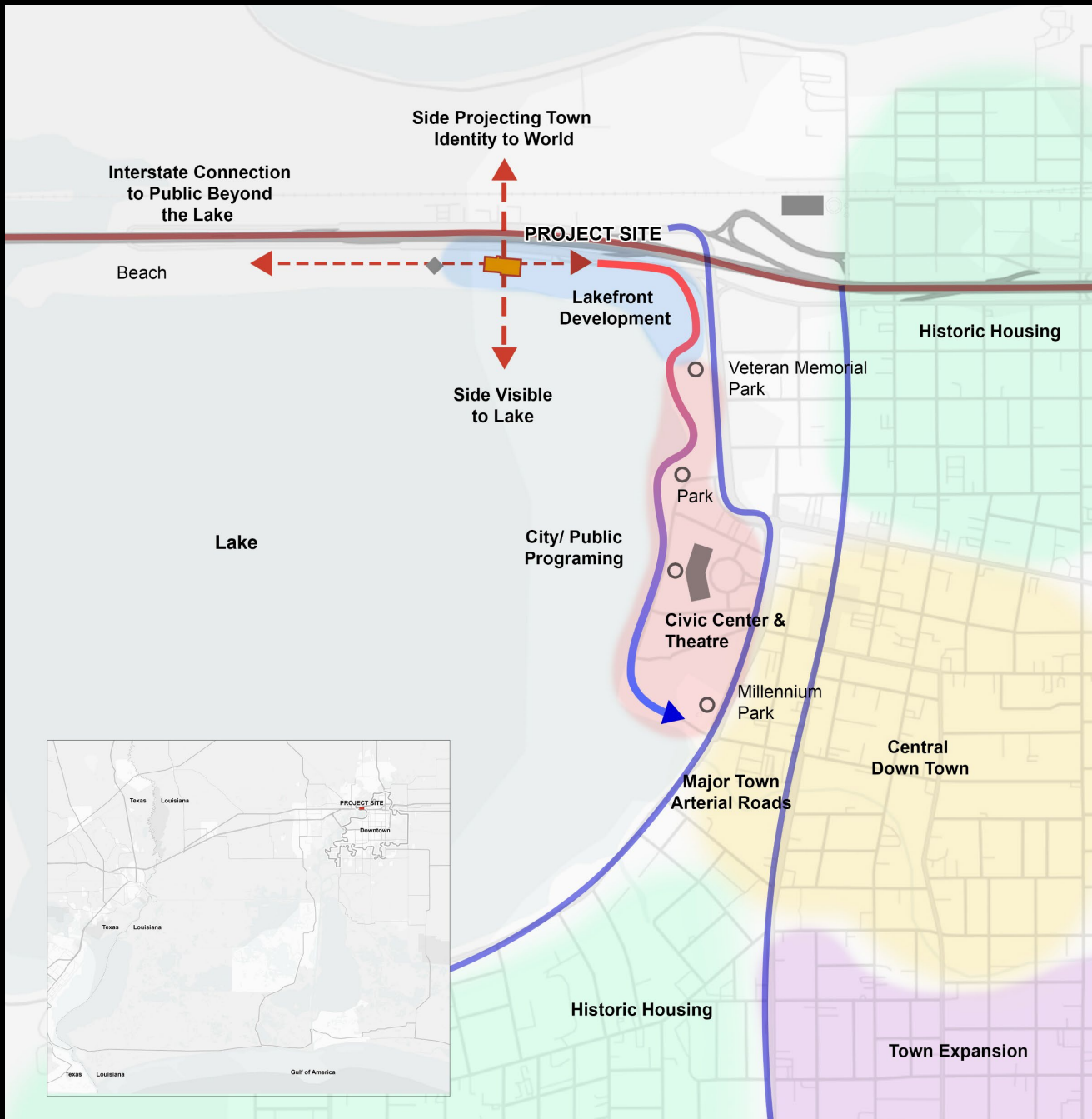
Its presence is unmistakable from across the water, where the building's undulating roofline creates a dynamic and recognizable silhouette. This expressive form not only reflects its environmental context but has also come to symbolize the city's resilience and regrowth in the wake of two devastating hurricanes. Its intention was to catalyze adjacent development, inspire renewed investment and help to reestablish a vibrant cultural scene along the waterfront.

As a community uniquely shaped by its relationship to the water, the city embraces a lifestyle where the lake is both a destination and a daily presence. Positioned along the shoreline, the museum strengthens this connection by serving as a civic gathering place that celebrates the city's identity, framing views of the water while linking residents and visitors to educational, cultural, and environmental experiences rooted in the lakefront setting.

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The project is placed on former wetlands north of the lake that were reinforced to construct the interstate. As such the city is situated south and east of the lake. The museum is a defining building for the city, as its iconic silhouette is visible from most all places on the lakefront, and is one of the first buildings visible when approaching town from Interstate 10. This high-profile location, close to downtown and easily accessible to most people in the city and outlying communities, suited the museum's mission of being a cultural touchstone in its targeted area of Louisiana.

The building exists within a walkable distance to the city's Civic center and is the starting project for the city's push to create social spaces along the lakefront as a means of revitalizing downtown development and exists along a boardwalk that the city built along the lakefront redevelopment district.



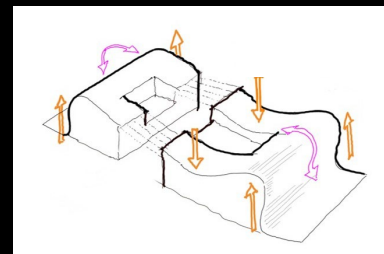
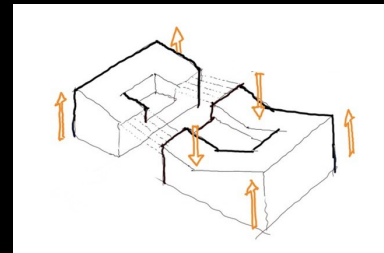
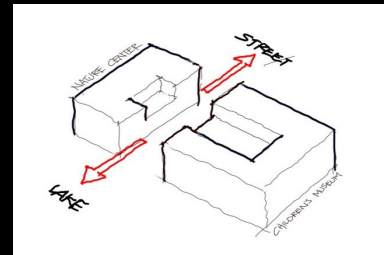
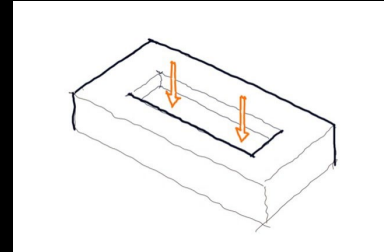
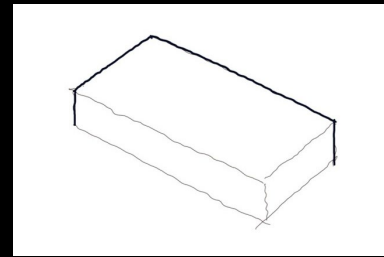
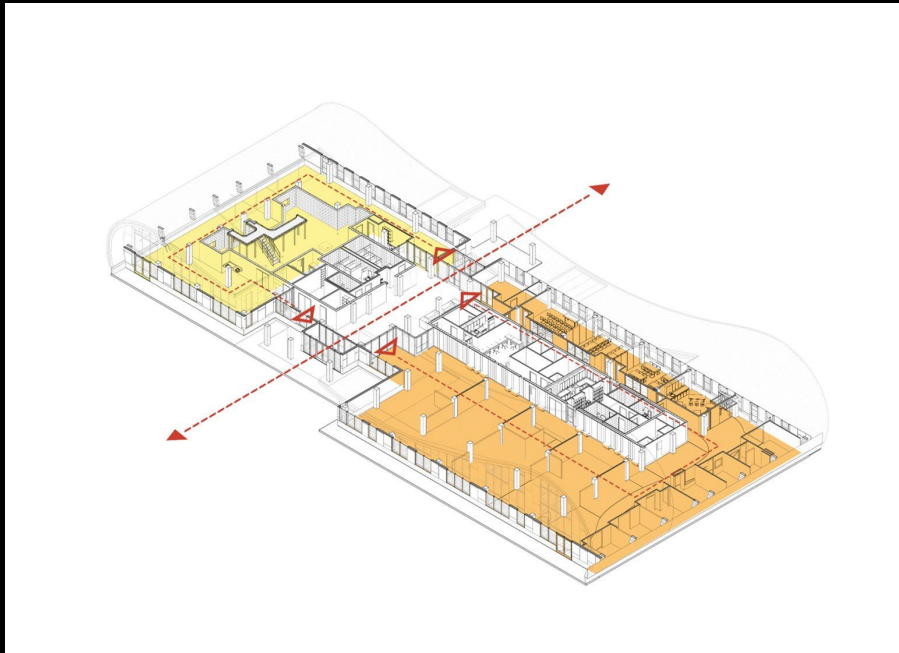


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The organization of the building directly reflects the union of its two programmatic components—the nature center and the children's museum.

Each maintains its own identity, yet both are shaped and aligned to support a shared experience rooted in exploration, learning, and community engagement.

The museum serves as an interactive microcosm of the city, translating complex environmental and civic relationships into tangible experiences. The boardwalk offers a platform from which visitors can engage directly with the lake, the city, and the expansive natural landscape beyond. In turn, the building is oriented to celebrate these same vistas, creating a constant dialogue between the museum and its context. This connection underscores a fundamental premise of the project: that the lessons learned and actions inspired within the museum can be scaled outward to positively impact the larger community.



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At the core of the composition is a central lobby that acts as a public threshold and gathering space, seamlessly linking the street-facing urban edge to the lakeside landscape.

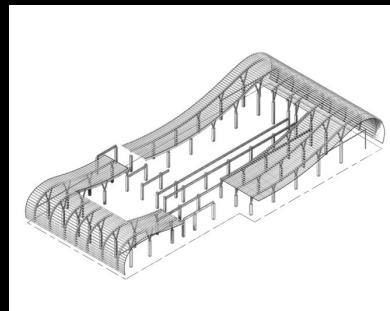
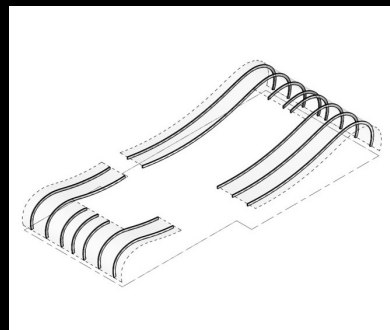
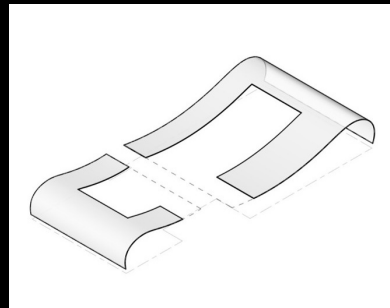
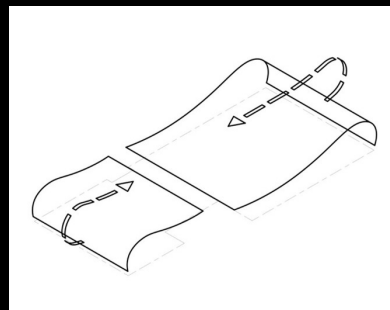
This open, accessible spine invites visitors to move through the building as an extension of the public realm, guiding them along a continuous path that connects directly to the new waterfront. In doing so, the museum becomes more than a destination; it functions as a connector that integrates city, building, and nature into a unified experience.

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Exhibits are fully integrated into the architecture, bringing the museum to life on another level and blurring the line between building and experience. The plan is organized around a central service core housing offices, restrooms, mechanical systems, and storage, allowing all visitor-focused programs to occupy the perimeter. This arrangement places the galleries on display to the surrounding city and waterfront, creating a sense of transparency and engagement from both inside and out. At the same time, staff and administrative functions are centralized, providing efficient and direct access to each gallery space and supporting seamless operations throughout the museum.

Within this framework, the children's museum galleries are organized into distinct thematic zones—nature, health, technology, and the city. Each gallery offers immersive, hands-on experiences that encourage exploration and learning through play. The city gallery, in particular, emphasizes role-playing environments where children can engage with real-world scenarios, fostering creativity, collaboration, and a deeper understanding of their community. Together, these exhibits activate the architecture, transforming it into a dynamic environment where education, interaction, and imagination are continuously on display.

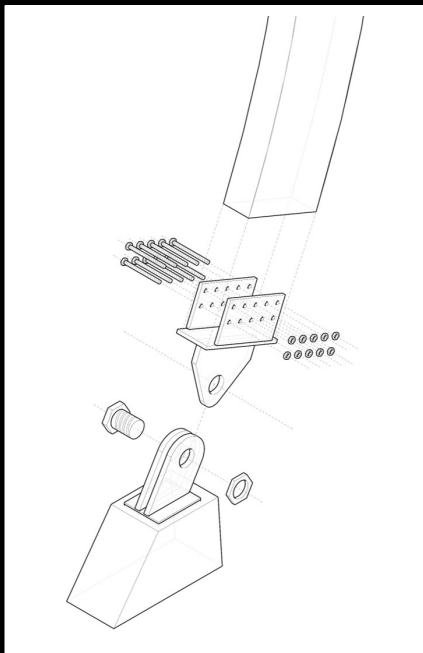




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The building's structural system is a direct expression of its conceptual intent. A series of curving glulam girders span the length of the building, rising and converging at the central public lobby, where the two programmatic elements meet.

The rhythm of the structural bays is carefully coordinated with the organization of the exhibits, reinforcing a cohesive relationship between architecture and program. Each bay establishes a spatial cadence that aligns with distinct experiential zones, guiding movement and framing moments of interaction.



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This choice of timber as the primary material speaks to resilience and renewal, symbolizing the regrowth of the museum following its destruction.

Rather than concealing these elements, the design celebrates them, exposing and enlarging the structure so that it becomes part of the visitor experience. In this way, the museum itself transforms into an exhibit, inviting curiosity and discovery as young visitors engage with the scale, form, and materiality of the building around them.



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At both ends of the building, the glulam girders extend downward to meet the ground, anchoring the structure and marking key exhibit spaces. These moments correspond to signature installations at the children's museum and nature center ends, where structure and content intertwine to create immersive and memorable destinations within the larger composition.





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The lighthouse climber draws its inspiration from a deeply rooted piece of local history. After hearing stories of a once-beloved lighthouse in the region, the design team undertook research that led to the discovery of archival drawings of the historic lighthouse.

Recognizing its significance to the community, the team saw an opportunity to reinterpret this lost icon within the new museum. As both the architects and exhibit designers, we embraced this narrative, transforming the lighthouse into an interactive climber that reconnects visitors with a shared cultural memory. In doing so, the project revives the spirit of the original structure, reintroducing it as a central and engaging element of the museum experience while honoring its place in the history of the city.



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Shaped by the lessons of past storms, the building envelope was designed to meet stringent hurricane performance standards, ensuring durability and long-term resilience for the institution.

The exterior walls and roof work together as a robust yet expressive system, reinforcing both protection and identity. Along the north and south facades, vertical slot windows undulate rhythmically across the length of the building, their placement aligned with the dynamic exhibits housed within. These openings offer framed glimpses of activity inside while animating the exterior with a sense of movement and discovery.

Among these features, the lighthouse climber emerges as a visible landmark, its presence clearly seen from across the lake. At its peak, a visitor-activated light rotates outward, extending the experience beyond the building and signaling back to the city, reinforcing the museum's role as both beacon and destination.





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The building is organized to engage its surroundings on all sides, presenting two primary “front” facades—one addressing the lake and the other the city. This dual orientation reinforces its role as both civic gateway and waterfront destination.

At its center, a compact service core consolidates support spaces, allowing the perimeter galleries to remain open, visible, and highly accessible, ensuring operational efficiency and a seamless visitor experience.



Extending from the lakeside façade, a public pier serves as the culminating feature of the broader waterfront development, drawing visitors outward from the museum and nature center to the water's edge. This connection provides a direct and tangible engagement with the lake itself, transforming the building from a destination into an active participant in the landscape and reinforcing its role as a bridge between the city and its natural environment.



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This final image captures the museum as both landmark and living environment, defined by its curvilinear roofline that anchors the building within its lakeside setting while giving it an unmistakable identity. This sweeping form embodies the meeting of the nature center and children's museum, drawing inspiration from the fluid geometry of the water and expressing their coming together as one unified institution.

As a whole, the museum has become the iconic anchor envisioned for the waterfront, catalyzing renewed energy and growth throughout the city. Its design is deeply informed by the history and ecology of its site, shaping not only the architectural expression but also the immersive exhibit experiences within, supported by a thoughtful and sustainable approach to material selection.