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building the landscape

diller scofidio + renfro / fxfowle in new york

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Center for Global Conservation

Bronx, New York

An office building in the Bronx Zoo seems as natural to the site as the surrounding parkland and accommodates multiple programs with minimal resources.

Staring out the window is part of the job description. By Laura Raskin

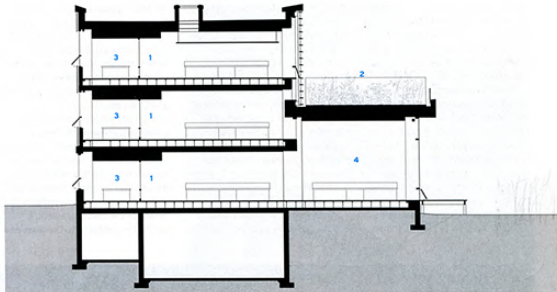
An intensive green roof slopes from the third floor to a wet meadow and provides necessary egress. Native grasses, flowers, and shrubs thrive on its path.

Society (WCS) programs. WCS operates the largest network of wildlife parks in the world, including the Bronx Zoo, New York Aquarium, Central Park Zoo, Queens Zoo, and Prospect Park Zoo, and operates over 500 conservation programs in more than 65 countries. Until the new headquarters was completed in 2009, WCS employees were scattered in buildings across the Bronx Zoo. FXFOWLE, which had previously renovated the zoo's Lion House in 2008, consolidated various programs with diverse needs at an unused edge of the park. After looking at various configurations, the firm designed the building to intrude as little as possible on the landscape, even deflecting it to save two trees. WCS employees now benefit from chance encounters. "It's really changed our relationship. Proximity is everything," says Susan Chin, vice president of planning and design and chief architect for WCS.

In mild weather, employees eat and work outside on the generous terraces. This was the hope, says FXFOWLE senior partner Sylvia Smith. "Rather than give everyone a private office, we created good workspaces and conference rooms and then extended the building with the outdoor space," she says, pointing to a patio that is the same size as the staff dining room. "We did a lot of pairing, trying to blur the line." When employees sit outside in front of the building they find themselves in the middle of a marshlike valley thick with native grasses.

Park visitors pass close to the private building, but it is set back in the landscape, creating the sense that the CGC is in the middle of the woods, not New York City. A berm built into the natural landscape frames a promenade that guides visitors to its entrance – they are welcome to use its outdoor dining spaces and explore the property.

Smith led a recent tour of the building that began on the ground floor. A glass and poured-in-place concrete entrance leads to a flight of stairs and the real arrival space – the second floor's combined lounge and library – where windows look out to Fordham Road and the New York Botanical Garden beyond.



SECTION A-A

0 10 FT.
3 M.

FXFOWLE wanted occupants to feel framed by the landscape, says Smith. The main conference room, located to the south of the lounge, is an elegant example of this design principle, with a raised floor, clean detailing, and a cantilevered roof that extends the room into the woods. Working with ornithologists at the CGC and the New York

Audubon Society, the firm designed two floor-to-ceiling insulated glass walls made of a type of glazing that birds see as opaque. To humans, the glass looks pleasantly and subtly pinstriped. The CGC is in a migratory path, and the conference room is in the most wooded corner, making this a necessary measure. Rectangular red sandstone panels line the back

- 1 OPEN OFFICE SPACE
- 2 GREEN ROOF
- 3 OFFICES
- 4 MAIN CONFERENCE ROOM





ABOVE: The Center for Global Conservation was inflected to save two specimen trees. Employees often sit on the patio surrounded by the nature preserve setting.

OPPOSITE: Located at the northern edge of a clearing, the CGC's form, sun shading, and ventilation help reduce energy consumption and maximize occupants' comfort.

- 1 CENTER FOR GLOBAL CONSERVATION
- 2 WET MEADOW BIOSWALE
- 3 SEABIRD COLONY
- 4 ASTOR COURT FOUNTAIN
- 5 AQUATIC BIRD HOUSE
- 6 COPE LAKE
- 7 GUERLAIN ROAD
- 8 MICRO TURBINES
- 9 ASTOR COURT ADMINISTRATION



EMPLOYEES ON THEIR lunch break at the Center for Global Conservation (CGC) recently paused to observe wild turkeys roaming in front of the building. In the northwest corner of the Bronx Zoo's 265 acres of New York City parkland, this display isn't a rare occurrence. Nor is the sight of Inca terns swooping in the seabird aviary across from the CGC headquarters. Muskrats and goldfinches visit, too. Perhaps these creatures continue to treat the turf as their own because the rectangular, elongated three-story building – which achieved LEED Gold Certification in 2009 – seems as natural to the site as the two rock outcroppings it bridges.

The CGC, designed by FXFOWLE, houses several Wildlife Conservation

of the conference room. Salvaged from the renovation of the 1903 Lion House, they are a reminder of place and history. In other areas, cleared trees from the site were milled and repurposed for trim.

On all three floors, bathrooms, copy rooms, and other support spaces are clustered at the off-center core. Private offices face north, while open, flexible office spaces face south. Approximately 140 people currently work in the building and there is room for more. "Within a fairly compact footprint, it doesn't feel constrained," says Smith of the private offices, thanks

to minimal furniture that can be easily rearranged. Large windows on the northern and southern facades, as well as glazing in the private offices out to the hallways, allow light to penetrate the depth of the building. A window punctuating the westernmost edge of the building shows a view of a gas-fired 400 kW micro-turbine power system that supplies 100 percent of the building's electricity. Waste heat from the micro-turbines is used for heating and cooling the CGC, and for domestic hot water.

Another important component – just as seamlessly integrated – is

the sloping intensive green roof that doubles as egress. It begins on the third floor next to an outdoor patio and continues to ground level. Native grasses, flowers, and shrubs nearly obscure the outline of a walking path. During the tour, Smith and Chin casually pulled out overgrowth while chatting about gardening. Knowing that many green roofs fail because of leaks, the FXFWLE team conducted comprehensive water testing on the CGC's roof. Louvers made of locally grown black locust striate the southern facade of the building, adding a weathered aesthetic to the glass and

concrete. Smith notes that black locust is one of the hardest woods and is used elsewhere in the park. The louvers mimic a moveable Cumaro wood screen that helps shade the staff dining room.

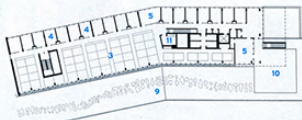
Chin says she hears repeatedly from occupants and visitors that they love the building. It's the kind of feedback that the animals in the exhibits she designs can't give. "These [outdoor] seats are filled in good weather. People bring their laptops out. It's actually getting used the way we hoped it would," she says. "I feel like we grew up a little when we came here." ■



For a video tour of the project see our website or iPad edition.

- 1 ENTRY PATH
- 2 LOBBY
- 3 OPEN OFFICE
- 4 OFFICES
- 5 CONFERENCE ROOMS
- 6 MAIN GATHERING SPACE

- 7 MAIN CONFERENCE ROOM
- 8 LIBRARY ARCHIVE
- 9 GREEN ROOF
- 10 OUTDOOR DECK
- 11 COPY CENTER
- 12 OPEN TO BELOW



THIRD FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



OPPOSITE: A vantage point on a staircase to the third floor provides a view of the main gathering space and library. An outdoor patio extends the gathering space.

ABOVE: The main entrance to the CGC is next to the staff kitchen. A moveable Cumaro wood screen can obscure views into or out of the dining area. Large rock outcroppings anchor both ends of the building.

CREDITS

ARCHITECT: FXFWOLE - Sylvia Smith, senior partner; Susan Masi, associate; Guy Geier, managing partner, interiors

CLIENT: The Wildlife Conservation Society

ENGINEERS: Langan Engineering & Environmental Services (civil); DeSimone Consulting Engineers (structural); Kallen & Lemelson (m/e/p)

CONSULTANTS: HM White Site Architects (landscape); Brandston Partnership (lighting); Cerami & Associates (acoustic)

SIZE: 35,000 square feet

COST: \$29 million

COMPLETION DATE: June 2009

SOURCES

CURTAIN WALL: US Aluminum and Competition Architectural Metals

BIRD-SAFE GLASS: Glaswerke Arnold

LIGHTING CONTROL: Lutron

GREEN ROOF: American Hydrotech