

Art Museum of Western Virginia

Roanoke, Virginia

Role: Museum Planner and Conceptual Designer for relocated Art Museum (prior to the Taubman Museum of Art)

Program: permanent and changing art galleries, exhibit and collections support areas, lobby, library, 150-seat auditorium, gift shop, function spaces, art studios and offices

Building Area: 66,000 sf; Art Galleries: 20,000 sf

Status: Museum Plan and Conceptual Design completed in 1999

Description: VernerJohnson was hired to prepare a museum plan and concept design for relocating the Art Museum of Western Virginia. At the time, the Museum was located in a small museum complex in the heart of downtown Roanoke. An old furniture store a few block away had been donated to the Museum to be used for its new facility. Our conceptual design endeavored to create a striking architectural icon for western Virginia.

This new building was planned to draw additional tourists and visitors to the city by providing a dramatic visual centerpiece for the region, adding to the revitalization of Roanoke. We combined traditional materials and innovative design to create a building which is one with its neighbors and yet highly distinctive. The rooftop is perhaps the building's most distinctive feature. Floating above the top of the building are a series of undulating steel and tensile fabric canopies that, in some places, cover the outdoor roof terraces and in other places form the translucent ceiling of the café/restaurant.

The rooftop was designed to be one of the most spectacular spaces in Roanoke, one that every visitor to the museum feels compelled to experience, and has become the icon of the Museum. The spaces within the new museum have been designed to support a full range of museum exhibits and other activities. Spaces include approximately 20,000 SF of permanent and changing galleries, a multi-level central lobby space that can be set up for large functions, a 150-seat multi-purpose auditorium, a museum store, ArtVenture areas, library, exhibit support, collections support, education support, administrative office areas, and related building support areas. A central atrium space connects all five levels of the museum allowing natural light to filter down from the canopies, illuminating a specially commissioned sculpture that winds its way through the public levels.

Subsequent to our planning work, the Museum decided to change site locations and build the highly flamboyant Taubman Museum of Art.

