

BEST OF
2007
AWARDS

Staten Island Zoo Reptile Wing

AWARD OF MERIT: Cultural

The Staten Island Zoo now brings an Amazonian-like atmosphere, complete with venomous snakes and alligators, to visitors to its recently completed wing, the Carl F. Kauffeld House of Reptiles. The new wing offers interactive and educational learning and viewing space.

The new 13,000-sq-ft area broke ground in early 2005 and was completed in April. The project was developed by the New York City Department of Design and Construction. The project team consisted of project manager Hill International of New York City, in conjunction with architects Gruzen Samton and exhibit architect Curtis + Ginsburg, both also from New York City.

The new wing offers a showcase for reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates from around the world, including lizards, alligators, frogs, turtles and anaconda snakes. The new exhibits are dramatic and vibrant and include native plants, rocks and waterfalls in some areas.

Wildlife illustrator Amy Bartlett Wright created detailed murals for other areas. These displays help to paint the most realistic portrait of each species' natural habitat. The Reptile Wing is centrally focused around the prominent sky-lit rotunda, meant to evoke the shape of a coiled snake, where visitors can view the alligator and turtle pools. In addition to these and other exhibits, visitors can view python, anaconda and desert areas in the wing.

Most unique is the new "Fear Zone" located in the venomous snakes portion of the wing, where visitors can hear sounds of a snake heartbeat, hiss and rattle. Contrary to what the name may imply, the goal of the Fear Zone is actually to make visitors more at ease around these often-frightening animals.

"The main intent is to eliminate the fear of reptiles, particularly snakes, and



dispel cultural misconceptions and myths of reptiles through education and by providing opportunities to interact with samples," says R. Darby Curtis, AIA, principal of Curtis + Ginsburg.

He adds that the walking path a visitor takes through the zone is meant to evoke the shape of a snake's body. Along this path are visual displays on one side and live venomous snakes on the other. In addition, the zone contains a "snake ceiling," above the walking path, created by a model of a snake's vertebrae.

The project's scope encompassed more than just new construction. The team demolished the existing 68-year-old Reptile Wing, putting in its place a new facility with classrooms, offices, public spaces and enlarged exhibit areas, all while keeping the zoo open for operation. The ongoing safety of visitors had to be kept at the forefront of planning at all times.

In addition, what began as an \$8.5 million project grew into a \$12.7 million project due to additions. The greatest of

Key Players

Developer: New York City Department of Design and Construction

Project Manager: Hill International

Architect: Gruzen Samton Architects

Exhibit Architect: Curtis + Ginsburg

General Contractor: C & L Contracting

Electrical Contractor: Community Electric

HVAC Contractor: AWL Industries, Inc.

Plumbing Contractor: Lasata-Corallo Plumbing

these changes was a \$2 million electrical system overhaul.

The upgraded HVAC and new electrical system for the wing allow complete climate control for all areas of the building and the flexibility to keep some areas cooler and drier and others warmer and more humid based on the animals' needs.

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