

For Immediate Release

November 14, 2013



SFMOMA UNVEILS NEW GRAND STAIR DESIGN

Open, Expansive Atrium Looks to Museum's Future with Increased Focus on Public Access and Admission-Free Art Experiences

November 14, 2013—The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) today unveiled the Snøhetta-designed grand stair that will greet visitors in the museum's existing Haas Atrium and invite them into the heart of its new 235,000-square-foot [building expansion](#), currently [under construction](#) and slated for completion in early 2016.

Embracing architect Mario Botta's original atrium design, the new stair will enhance the space for the display of art and allow a more direct experience of natural light streaming down from the oculus, which will be visible as a complete circle for the first time. The stair will also serve as a key bridge between the existing and new parts of the building, integrating them into a seamless whole.



SFMOMA's new Snøhetta-designed stair (view from Third Street entrance), shown here with previous atrium art installation by Sol LeWitt (inaugural art installation for 2016 reopening to be announced); rendering by Steelblue

Centered below the oculus and completely open to the atrium, the Snøhetta-designed stair will create an expansive, flowing entry point that will welcome visitors up into the Art Court—a new nexus for visitor orientation located on the second floor.

A central goal of the expansion's overall design is to create additional entrances and access points into the museum. The Art Court will serve as the admissions hub for visitors coming through both the existing entrance on Third Street and a new major entrance on Howard Street that will beckon visitors into the building through a large glass-walled gallery. These three admission-free, art-filled areas for public gathering—the atrium, Art Court, and Howard Street gallery—will transform the ground-floor experience of the expanded SFMOMA and weave the museum more deeply into neighborhood life.

“With its beautiful floating geometry and open feel, Snøhetta's stair signals a new direction that is respectful of the existing architecture yet very forward-looking,” says SFMOMA Director Neal Benezra. “In many ways, it's emblematic of the way the overall expansion design marries the visions of two great architects to create an entirely new visitor experience.”

“We have imagined a stair that feels at home in Botta's atrium, yet introduces the visitor to the language of the new spaces, creating a powerful overlap moment between the two worlds,” says Snøhetta principal architect Craig Dykers. “It bridges the current and future buildings and extends the existing design vocabulary while foreshadowing

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that of the new Snøhetta addition. Most importantly, the new stair serves the next stage in the trajectory of the museum, which is about reaching out, embracing a wider public, and becoming more extroverted.”



SFMOMA's new Snøhetta-designed stair (side view), shown here with previous atrium art installation by Sol LeWitt (inaugural art installation for 2016 reopening to be announced); rendering by Steelblue

Completely New Atrium Experience

The stair spans a single rise, from the ground level of the Haas Atrium to the Art Court on the second floor, signaling that the continuation of one’s journey is directly ahead and keeping views toward that space open and transparent. Rather than following a straight or spiral configuration, Snøhetta’s variation on a switchback design is inspired by the notion of traversing an incline. This zigzag movement will slow visitors as they climb through a beloved part of the museum and encourage them to pause and take in the beauty of the atrium and the art installed there.

“The stair also creates a wonderful landscape moment that relates to the building’s urban surroundings, evoking San Francisco’s signature terrain of hills and terraces,” says Dykers.

Ascending the initial rise, the visitor will face a monumental artwork on the right side of atrium, then turn 90 degrees at the first landing to face the installation at left—in both cases experiencing a direct, intimate view unobstructed by columns. With one more turn, the stair then straightens out at the top, luring visitors into the Art Court with views of a new large-scale vertical garden located in an outdoor sculpture terrace that spans the entire width of the building.

As visitors descend the stair, two landings will offer sweeping views over the atrium’s social activities and art installations. Loose seating around the base will complete the structure’s asymmetrical geometry, and the deep jog in the stair’s freestanding sculptural form will allow people to stand at its center. The materials used—wood, glass, and terrazzo—are the core palette of the expansion and complement the stone and timber of the existing building.

A Thoughtful Approach

Based on audience-growth estimates and extensive analysis of pedestrian circulation and ticketing functions, Snøhetta’s stair configuration will ease visitor flow while preserving the overall character of Botta’s original atrium as a dynamic, open plaza. It is projected that the majority of SFMOMA’s visitors will continue to enter the museum from the main entrance on Third Street.

“In 2011, when we first shared with Botta the need to replace the stair in order for the building to function, he met the news with gracious understanding,” says Ruth Berson, SFMOMA deputy director of curatorial affairs, who also serves as staff lead on the museum’s expansion project. “There was never a question about necessity, given anticipated increases in attendance.”

“While grand in dimensions, the stair’s impressive cantilevered construction gives it a very modest footprint,” says Dykers. “And its atypically low walls make it feel smaller than it is, which gives the atrium a new, open, airy, character that looks to SFMOMA’s future.”

About SFMOMA's Expansion

Since SFMOMA's founding in 1935, the museum has drawn nearly 23 million visitors, 50% of them since moving to its current location on Third Street in 1995. Over the past 17 years, San Francisco's South of Market neighborhood has grown up around the museum: new hotels, retail, restaurants, and residential properties were built and continue to thrive, all contributing to the tax base and economic vitality of the city. In 2016, SFMOMA's new home will again transform the neighborhood as a major tourist attraction and as an employer: upon completion of the expansion, SFMOMA anticipates an over 20% increase in employees as well as 20% growth in its audiences, which currently average 650,000 annually. The expansion will create more than 1,400 new jobs in construction and related areas, and SFMOMA will be an even greater economic stimulant when it expands its operations and purchases of goods and services from Bay Area businesses.

To date, SFMOMA has raised more than \$554 million toward its capital campaign, or more than 91% of its \$610 million goal—a total that includes funds for both construction and endowment.

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The first West Coast museum devoted to modern and contemporary art, SFMOMA is currently undergoing a major [expansion project](#) to open in 2016 that will significantly enhance gallery, education, and public spaces, enabling the museum to better showcase more of its [expanded permanent collection](#). While the museum is temporarily closed for construction, from June 3, 2013 to early 2016, SFMOMA will be “on the go” with an extensive array of [off-site programming](#) across the Bay Area, including collaborative and traveling museum exhibitions, major outdoor projects and commissioned installations, and new education initiatives.

Visit our website at www.sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

SFMOMA is supported by a broad array of contributors committed to helping advance its mission. Major annual support is provided by Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund. Major support for school, youth, and family programs is provided by the Wells Fargo Foundation, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, and Target. Education, conservation, and interactive technology programs are generously supported by the Leanne B. Roberts Fund for Education and The Getty Foundation.

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