

# RETREAT

RETREATS OFFER BREAKS IN THE DOMINANT AMBIENCE OF THE MUSEUM. THEY COME IN A VARIETY OF FORMS: WHETHER SHORT OR LONG BREAKS, THEY PROVIDE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL PACING AND AN OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT, RELAX, AND SOCIALIZE.

## ISSUES:

Even in the most captivating museums (and perhaps more so than in others) the problem of information overload, object satiation, and just over-doing it leads to museum fatigue. Totally worn out visitors may have enjoyed themselves but they are less likely to return in the near future if their best recall of the last visit was how exhausted they were.

Rainy Day Visits: A variety of retreats serve a range of visitors and can be a primary motivator for a museum visit. A rainy day is a good museum day. A variety of retreats gauged for children to adults provides a broader context and more opportunities to improve the passing moment.

The need for pacing of the activities and the physical movement through the museum varies with age, whether one is alone or in groups, is goal orientated or just browsing, or just had a tooth pulled. Very young children and their parents require retreats that are noisier than most.

More than a Bench: Inherent in retreats are the need to maintain them, to keep them secure, and to provide quality experiences. What seems like a good idea at the design stage can be a management nightmare. Outdoor gardens that are inaccessible and shabby, snack rooms stuck in the corner of the basement with only a garbage can are anti-retreat.

The variety of retreats and breakaway points are essential for resting, pacing, a change of activity and a change of mood. Museum fatigue includes the mind as well as the body.

## QUALITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS:

Usually, the word "retreat" conjures up images of sheltered gardens, dappled sunlight, and far views of meadows and hills. They have their place. Retreats can also be a pillowed niche along the path, a deep window ledge, a gross motor play area, a dining area or a place to pause and watch the clouds.

**Social Choice:** Opportunities for contemplation, to be alone, to be alone yet near others, and to have an excuse to talk to others are significant services for the museum to provide.

**Physical Relaxation:** A good place to wait for others and a place to get the feet up can make all the difference in the museum experience.

Good retreats can be simple or complex. They can overlook, provide refuge, be on the edge of activity. They can be active or reflective. They are usually a breath of fresh air for the mind.

#### **APPROACHES FOR DESIGN:**

Retreats can be thought of in terms of their visual content, activity content, and potential for social interaction and community service.

##### **1. Visual Content:**

The varied textures and colors of natural vegetation and materials, the sight and sound of running water, the light and shade and patterns of land forms and weather produce contrast in the natural environment. The spare elegance of a formal Japanese garden, a natural meadow, a broad expanse of wheat can provide a release. They are visual outdoor extensions.

Providing visual contrast is not limited to the natural environment. A distant city skyline, a near view of a picturesque harbor, a busy shipyard are all potent visual diversions as effective as the pastoral ones.

##### **2. Outdoor Rooms:**

Near ones can be outdoor rooms serving as a place for retreat. The sheltered courtyard may provide a modified, micro-climate that extends the temperate season. This includes sheltered outdoor play areas located out of the wind that capture the winter sun. Flexible coverings can extend the use further.

The most potent retreat of all is watching other people from afar, overlooking from a restaurant table, or on the edge of the activity.

##### **3. Activity:**

A variety of contexts and activities can provide diversions and places of retreat. They work well with visual retreats. For example, restaurants benefit from a good view, and interesting sights and provide interesting visual content, as well.

Dining and drinking are essential activities in a prolonged museum visit. If it is enjoyable, if it provides a memorable place for a retreat, it can be another reason for visiting the museum. Formal restaurants, informal cafeterias, and outdoor cafes have in common the sounds and aromas of dining and drinking. They stimulate anticipation and expectations of a refreshing break.

Gross motor activity provides release through the expenditure of energy, and through a shift in focus and perspective. Whether related to a museum theme or not, it can recharge both children and their adult companions. Gross motor activity areas can be inside or outside. They involve the large muscles of the body in complex and complimentary sets of movement incorporating the other senses as well. Climbing, crawling, rolling, hanging, running, jumping, and singing provide contrast, release, and a multi-sensory experience of form, place, space, and time.

#### **4. Social Interaction and Civic Role:**

Talking and playing with other people can provide diversion, release, and refreshment through many avenues. Couples, families, small groups, and large groups gather to converse, discuss, eat, or just sit and relax, and of course, watch other people.

Variation in the level of intimacy, exposure and interaction to the public domain requires a variety of arrangements from small, hidden nooks to seating overlooking busy and gregarious paths, to locations at the edge of a variety of activities.

The more public retreat areas can support a feeling of neighborhood and community. If they are visually or physically connected to the urban context, they can double function as an informal gathering area of special quality. Indoor, informal spaces can serve as an urban square.

The more active retreat areas can be settings for meeting new playmates from other neighborhoods.

EXAMPLES:

Louvre

Paris

A traditional circular bench in the midst of a major path provides a place to rest, an opportunity to view displays and to observe human activity.



Addition  
Boston Fine Arts Museum  
I. M. Pei

1981

The seam between the old and the new wings is a skylit street which contains many retreat features. A restaurant, a place to overlook, and a store are all visible from, but not in the way of the entry transition. It is the architectural and social heart of the new wing.



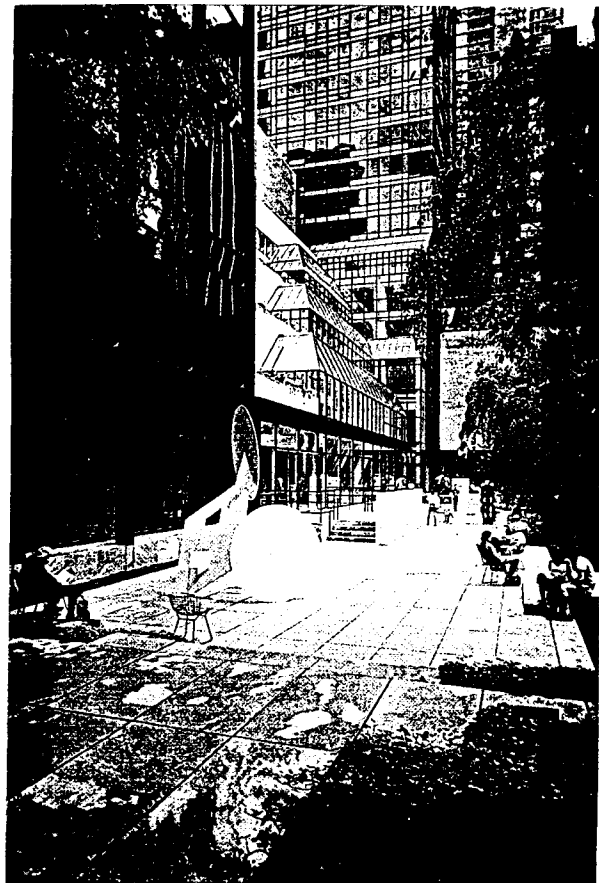
Freer Gallery of Art      Washington  
Charles Platt                      1923

The cloistered outdoor courtyard contrasts the museum's busy setting. It provides a visual retreat from the galleries, and place to relax in the warmer months.



Museum Outdoor Courtyard  
Museum of Modern Art      New York  
Philip Johnson & Cesar Pelli  
1953/1983

In the midst of New York the delightful garden and sculpture exhibit serve as a free treat for visitors and diners at the outdoor restaurant.



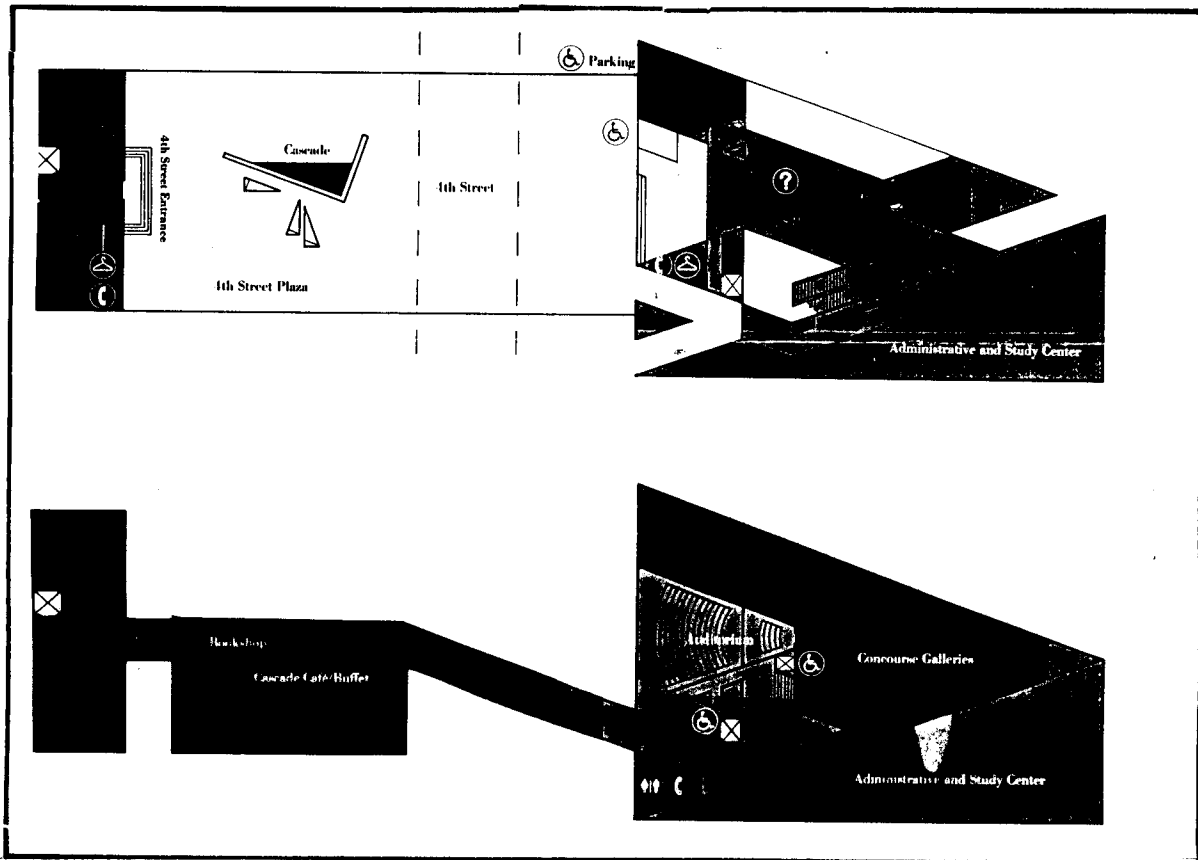


Louisiana Museum                      Denmark  
Borgen Bo & Wilhelm Wohlert 1958-59

The view through to the serene, tree-lined pond is a classic example of an indoor retreat. The limit of only a few chairs supports the intimacy of the place; the breathtaking visual relief fosters an atmosphere of meditation and reflection.

Connecting link between the East  
and West Wings,  
National Gallery Washington, D.C.  
I. M. Pei 1978

Located along the spine that links  
the two wings, two restaurants  
focus on the peopled underground  
passage that is accented by an  
under-street level waterfall.  
Overhead, a secondary diversion  
is provided by provocative, peopled  
skylights. Nearby are restrooms  
and a bookstore.



RELATED PRINCIPLES:

- \* OUTDOOR EXTENSION
- \* FOCAL POINTS