

THE RIGHT LOCATION

THE RIGHT LOCATION ENHANCES THE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE AND CONTRIBUTES TO ITS RATE OF USE BY PROVIDING PUBLIC VISIBILITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND A POSITIVE CONTEXTUAL IMAGE.

THE ISSUES:

A primary index of a museum's success is its "head count" -- the number of users visiting the museum. Although the quality and quantity of the museum's contents will influence the rate of use, the museum's location has a critical impact upon the number of visitors and the way in which they use it.

Use depends upon the accessibility of the museum, the real and the perceived. Although cars and buses, public transportation, walking, and biking are modes of arrival that open opportunities for various user groups, they require particular adjacencies and arrangements.

A major function of a good location is to provide physical visibility from near and afar. Even a central, accessible museum must have a visible presence to attract attention -- especially of the non-committed, incidental passersby and the tourist. This is related to the museum as a symbol of civic pride.

Every museum's location provides a setting, a context, and opportunities to establish the museum image: a serene, rural site evokes the image of retreat; a college campus location suggests scholarship and research; a site that is nestled in a residential neighborhood suggests and provides a direct connection to a community and its residents. Although associations of a neighborhood with crime, neglect, or other negatively perceived or real handicaps can affect usage, particularly when children are involved, the inherent negative image of a location poses a special design opportunity and a social challenge.

Economy in the construction of a museum is a major consideration in determining its location. The cost of a new site may place many areas of the city out of reach; and economic opportunities for building conversion, conservation and renewal may exist in certain areas that are otherwise less desirable, that conflict with the standards set for accessibility, visibility, and image. The final decision about location is usually a trade-off between several conflicting conditions.

QUALITIES & CHARACTERISTICS:

The variety of qualities found in the right location includes several that are diametrically opposite each other. The appropriateness of the choice depends upon the established hierarchy of goals and values. The right location provides:

- * A potent human attraction -- an existing landmark, a cluster of museums, a busy city center, or a pastoral refuge in the countryside.

- * Physical visibility to the public.

- * A pathway that is easy to identify and to use -- accessible to pedestrians and drivers with appropriate and ample parking; connected to public transportation.

- * A meaningful setting -- one that is distinct, preferably with a positive image, either compatible with the museum's spirit and form or contrasting it: a place of adventure and active participation, a place of retreat and pilgrimage, a place of research and scientific investigation, a place that is mysterious or incongruent -- an old factory, a warehouse district, a ship, an experimental laboratory.

APPROACHES FOR DESIGN:

1. SYMBOLIC RELATIONSHIPS:

Many cities concentrate their cultural facilities in a relatively small area which is accessible and manageable in a walking tour. The Museum Mile on

Mannattan's Fifth Avenue and the Smithsonian Mall in Washington, D.C. cluster a rich collection of museums and other cultural landmarks within a walking range.

2. DEPENDENCE ON A PROVEN LANDMARK:

A museum that is near or adjacent to a prominent building or landmark gains visibility and attraction through association. Many museums are built right on or around an archaeological dig or a place of contextual significance which then serves as the museum's landmark. The Roman-German museum in Cologne is lying literally in the shadow of the city's great cathedral. The flow of tourists and visitors can barely overlook the presence of the museum.

3. THE MAIN DRAG:

Locating a museum within a concentration of cultural and commercial facilities adds a special quality to the density of events and things to do. The resulting milieu attracts visitors for potential scenarios of an evening in town, a family outing, a shopping trip or a study trip.

A vibrant downtown in a city is a large scale example. I smaller scale example is the museum in a large shopping mall. The museum can share the amenities of the mall's eating places, services, and high accessibility; it achieves public visibility through the physical association; and in return, the museum contributes a richness to the ambience of the mall.

4. PLACES OF ADAPTIVE REUSE:

Many children's museums begin in an existing building which was designed for an entirely different purpose. The candidate buildings can range from old schools, stores, churches, clinics, train depots, and post offices to Victorian houses and even restaurants. The Boston Children's Museum is housed in a recycled warehouse on the waterfront; the new Cleveland Children's Museum will be housed in a former Howard Johnson's Restaurant.

The location of these buildings provides opportunities that can challenge the designer on many fronts. Since there are often in older areas of the city, or in business and industrial district, the image, accessibility, and context of the sites are inherently special and can set the stage for a very unique museum experience. The Temporary Contemporary Museum of Art in Los Angeles is a high style example of an industrial building turned into a temporary quarters for a museum: a unique physical image, evocative name, positive site features and other factors make this museum a memorable success.

5. IN ADDITION TO OR WITHIN:

A children's museum can be associated with a larger "parent" museum. If a section within the original building or a wing is designated the children's museum or youth area, the accessibility, image, and settings are provided by the larger museum. The Curiosity Place in the Chicago Museum of Science and Technology and the Sensations in the High Art Museum of Atlanta exploit this intimate relationship.

An identifiable addition to an existing museum building, with its own special entry and physical image, can exploit the positive "parent" relationship and yet retain more autonomy.

6. ON THE ROAD:

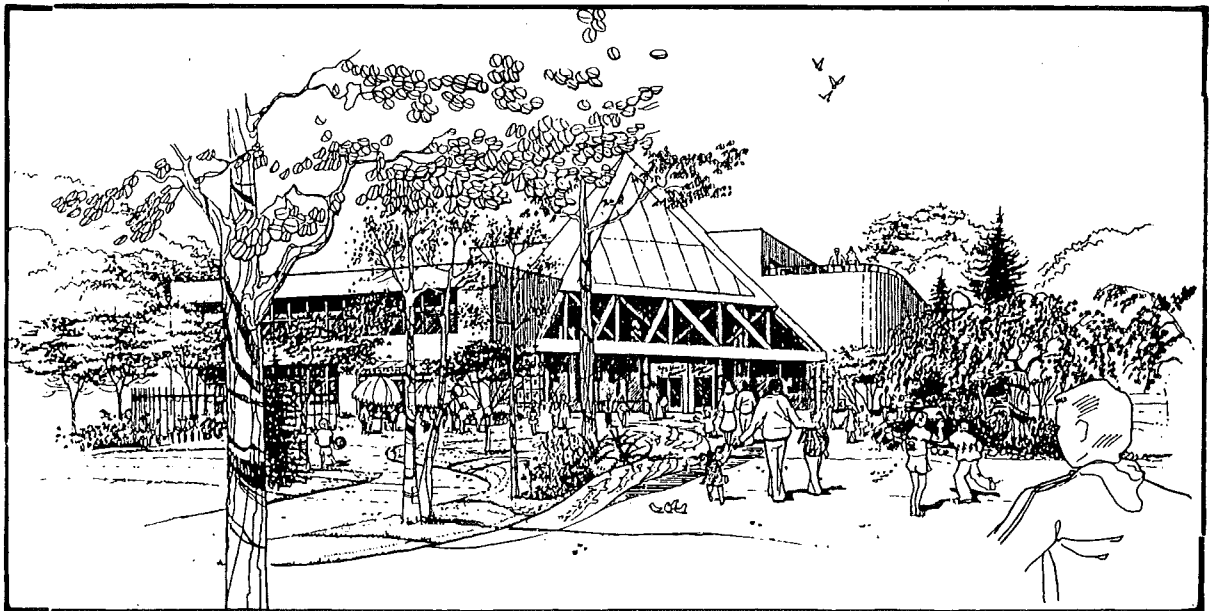
In contrast to the highly accessible and proximate central location, the decision to locate in an out-of-the-way place that requires a circuitous route can open many opportunities. Besides supporting the museum theme, a distant, serene, rural location can offer a memorable, pastoral image that extends the museum experience along the path to and from the museum.

Within an urban framework, the out-of-the-way setting exposes and informs visitors about an area that would not be visited normally. The journey can be an adventure.

EXAMPLES:

The Children's Museum Denver
Barker Rinker Seacat 1984

The museum is located across a major interstate highway from the stadium and adjacent to a river walkway. It is highly visible and accessible to the regional population.



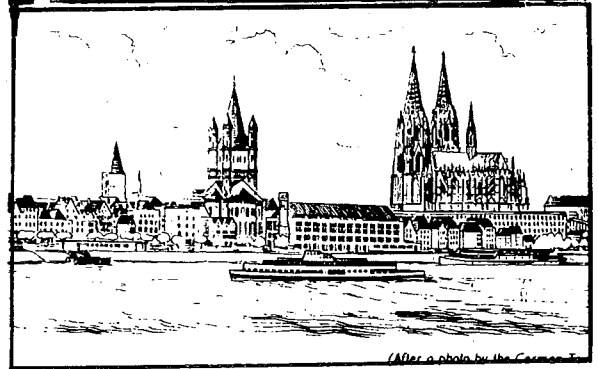
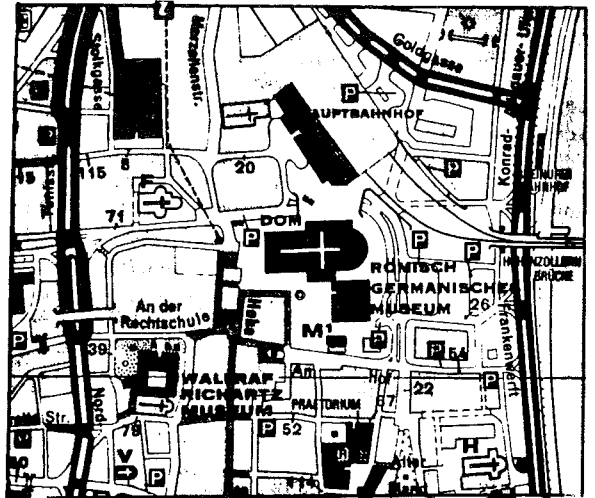
Franklin Institute's Museum on the Mall Philadelphia

Actually a science demonstration in the gallery space at Market East in Philadelphia, the outreach program brings art, science, and history to the market place and its shopping crowds. In return it gains recognition and visibility.



The Roman-Germanic Museum Cologne

Located in the midst of downtown Cologne on the same plaza as the world-famous cathedral, this physically low-profile museum reaps the benefit of its crowds.



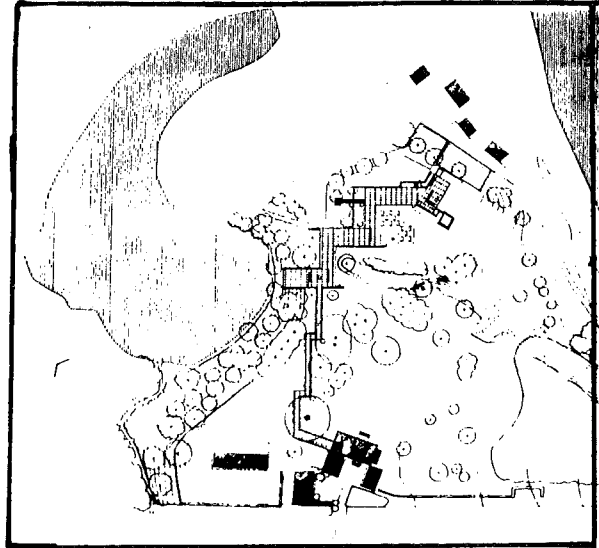
Pompidou Center Paris Piano and Rogers 1971-1977

A dramatic contrast between this high-technology structure and its 19th century structure and its 19th century residential neighbors enhances the museum's visibility. It has become a landmark in its own right.



Louisiana Museum Denmark
Borgen Bo and Wilhelm Wohlert
1958-59

The Louisiana museum is nestled in a classical rural setting: far removed from cities, it is situated between two lakes, rolling fields, trees and lush grass -- a real refuge in nature.



RELATED PRINCIPLES:

- * A LANDMARK
- * URBAN RESPONSE