

# A PREVIEW

A PREVIEW GIVES THE VISITOR OR VIEWER AN IDEA, CONCEPT OR IMAGE OF WHAT IS AHEAD, BEFORE ACTUALLY ENTERING A PLACE, A BUILDING.

## THE ISSUES:

Humans, adults and children alike, strive for predictability in their environments by constantly interpreting what is around them and what lies ahead. A good preview of an activity can provide them with a taste of what the museum is all about, a sense of what is inside.

museums have the compatible need to advertise, announce, and invite. museums may be tenants in buildings designed for other purposes and others may be housed in neutral boxes; all need to project an image, set a mood, convey a spirit. This need can be satisfied by a good preview.

## QUALITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF A PREVIEW:

A preview can provide clues or tangible evidence for the qualities and content of the place. A good preview can do one, all, or some of the following:

- introduce and inform about the inside;
- suggest the uniqueness of the place;
- invite, entice and attract, perhaps tease;
- set the visitor's mood;
- advertise and "push" a desired image, spirit, character;
- be humorous, playful, abstract or literal, non-threatening, descriptive, aesthetically pleasing, outrageous, elegant;

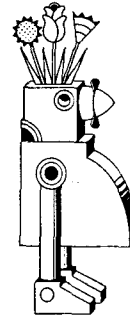
## APPROACHES FOR DESIGN:

### 1. A SIGN

A simple sign provides an introduction; it communicates the name of the facility. If the name is also descriptive and evocative, e.g., "The Exploratorium," the word association can trigger the viewer's imagination.

And signs can contain pictorial graphics--either in conjunction with the name or in place of it.

A logo for a brochure of a children's museum. It is suggestive of technology, nature, and fantasy. It is playful and joyful, a child's dream. This type of sign transcends the limits of expressing the built environment. Used on letterheads, brochures, posters, and maps, it can become the "corporate image"; by greeting the visitor at the airport and along the highway it is an extended preview!



## 2. "LETTING THE VISITOR IN" BEFORE ENTERING.

Having a glimpse of the exhibit, or a good view of a significant and special part of the inside without actually entering can introduce, entice, inform and stimulate both the intended visitors and others who go by.

A store-front, or glass wall along a busy sidewalk is one way to provide this inside-outside connection. (Proper lighting and the clever use of contrast in lighting can make these situations very dramatic).

## 3. HUMAN ACTIVITY POCKET.

The most powerful preview includes people--whether at work, play, or rest. Creating an activity pocket outside, where activity of the museum spills over into the street to get the attention of those passing by is an effective strategy.

Is it open? The presence of human activity can signal from a distance providing a non-verbal clue to the status of the museum.

There are many strategies for design of situations which become the catalyst for human activity that attracts others--the street corner store that attracts a crowd.

One example is the placement of a restaurant or museum store outside the museum proper. The advantages of externalizing them include their role as a symbolic sign as well as placing an active area upfront. Hot dog stands and street corner vendors are versions of a temporary activity that announce happenings. The Museum of Art in Santa Fe is aided in capturing attention away from the other attractions on the main square by the lemonade and hot dog stand on its corner.

The sales kiosk in the form of an oversized milk bottle in front of the Boston Children's Museum serves as a symbolic sign at a distance, and at closer range has the added dimension of providing refreshments--attracting, satisfying, and memorable through more than one sense.

A preview of children at play, whether inside or outside, is enticing, stimulating, and reassuring. It can be a preview of an interior activity through a storefront or a peephole. From a distance a gross-motor activity play area can serve as an extension of the building, signal the entry, or provide a sculptural element in the landscape. An example of this is the playground of the McDonald's Restaurant chain. It is up front, connected to the building, functioning as symbol and as an activity pocket.

#### 4. EXTENDING THE INSIDE, OUTSIDE.

An actual element of an exhibit or activity of the museum can be placed outside the building to provide an introduction, continuity, and clues to its contents.

It can be an object, even a fresco on the facade of a building that houses the permanent collection of a particular artist;

It can be an "event", such as the seal pool in front of the New England Aquarium in Boston which provides a clear and dynamic indication of what is inside;

It can be a temporary object or activity that is "on" when the museum is open, and not necessarily the same one at all times: a totem pole when the special exhibit is on Indians of the Northwest; a cobbler plying his trade when a traveling craft exhibit is in town; or it can be a gross-motor activity area that functions as a symbolic sculpture when the museum is closed and as a focal point of children's activity when the museum is open.

#### 5. REACHING OUT.

Establishing satellite displays, whether in malls or in other museums or even retail stores can provide a preview that requires less commitment than traveling to the museum proper. They can be direct as in the Franklin Institute's demonstrations in shopping centres; they can be subtle as the Chicago Museum of Modern Art retail store on Michigan Avenue.

## 6. A SYMBOLIC SUGGESTION.

Providing a preview that is not directly related to the context, that is an abstract connection or clue to the museum's inner workings is a more challenging design task.

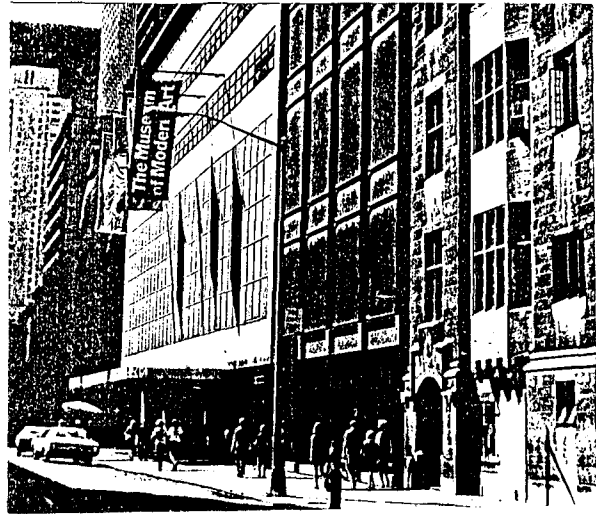
For example, in the Boston's children's museum the oversized milk bottle on the waterfront expresses many qualities of the preview concept. It is a playful collectible object; it evokes memories of childhood and earlier times. It is also a sign. Its form at that size is unique, outrageous; it is out of context; and it is memorable. Through the years it has become a Boston landmark.

A children's playground--sans children, or a sculpture can capture the mood and provide an association that stimulates a connection and triggers curiosity and anticipation.

EXAMPLES:

Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Edward Durrell Stone & Philip  
Goodwin

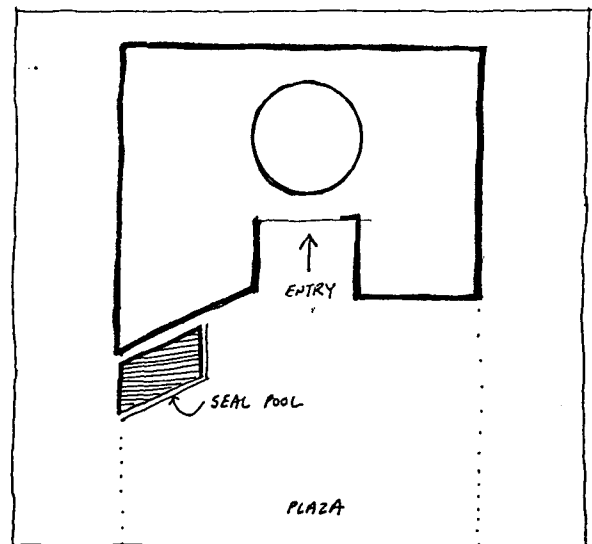
A "Storefront" allows people on the street to view the inside; they can see a glimpse of the main or current "show." If they miss the sign, they can "know" the function of the interior or a whole building by what they view. This preview allows the museum to work after hours, capturing the attention of those passing by, and enlivening the streetscape.

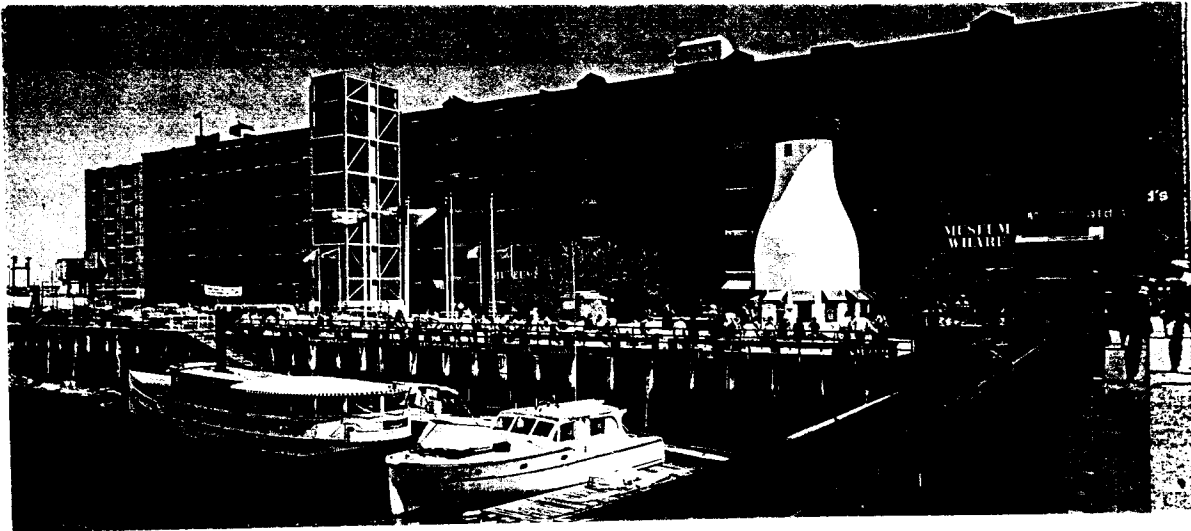


The New England Aquarium, Boston  
Cambridge Seven Associates, 1965

Adjacent to the entry, a pool with seals basking in the sun provides a small show that attracts spectators in the public plaza, while at the same time introducing the thematic content of the aquarium and setting the mood for the interior.

The pool is permanent, integrated into the design of the building. It lets the visitor in, extends the inside outside, directly samples the contents, and enlivens the urban milieu.





The Boston Children's Museum,  
Dyer/Brown and Associates, 1979

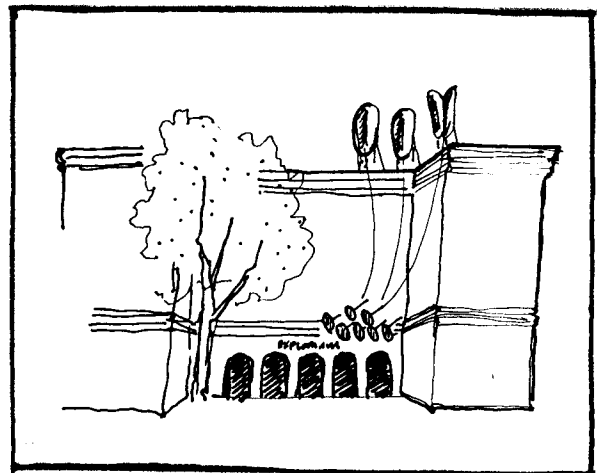
This landmark milk bottle is an indirect reference to the mood of the museum: old and collectible; a place for kids of all ages; a place for the unexpected. An everyday object out of context, out of scale, it hints at the improbability that the warehouse in the background is just a storage place. This is reinforced by the evidence of human activity surrounding it.

The Exploratorium, San Francisco  
Original Structure:  
Bernard Maybeck, 1915

In an abstract way, the wind-music sculpture perched over the entry represents the nature of the displays inside: scientific, creative, and fun.

The building was designed for another time and another kind of exposition, its style expressing a staid, formal image. The wind sculpture contrasts this, symbolically expressing the new approach to a usually very serious subject--science.

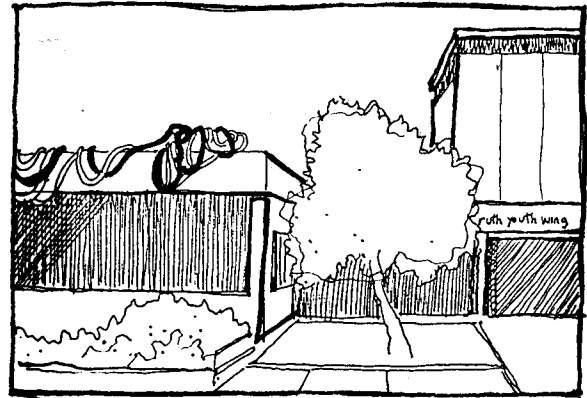
By locating the sculpture over the doorways, the abstract sign also signals entry, its music making it an event.



The Ruth Youth Wing  
Israel Museum, Jerusalem  
Alfred Mansfeld and Associates, 1966

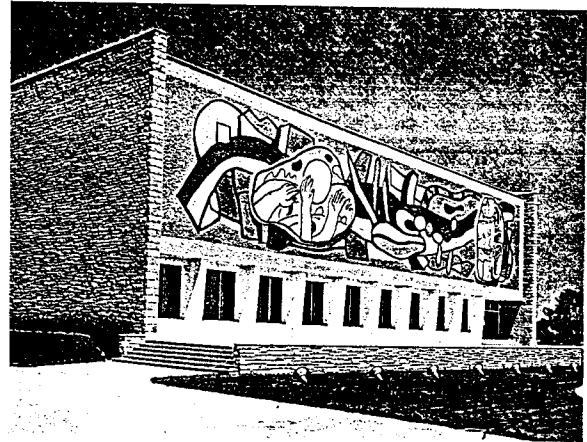
This multi-colored, octopus-like, playful, very different, abstract sculpture, an unlikely thing to be lying on a building, suggests the children's artwork that happens inside.

It is an element that sets apart this pavillion as unique among all the other repetitive pavillions in the Israel museum's campus. It "tells" the story about what happens inside.



Ferdinand Lejer Museum,  
Maritime Alps, France

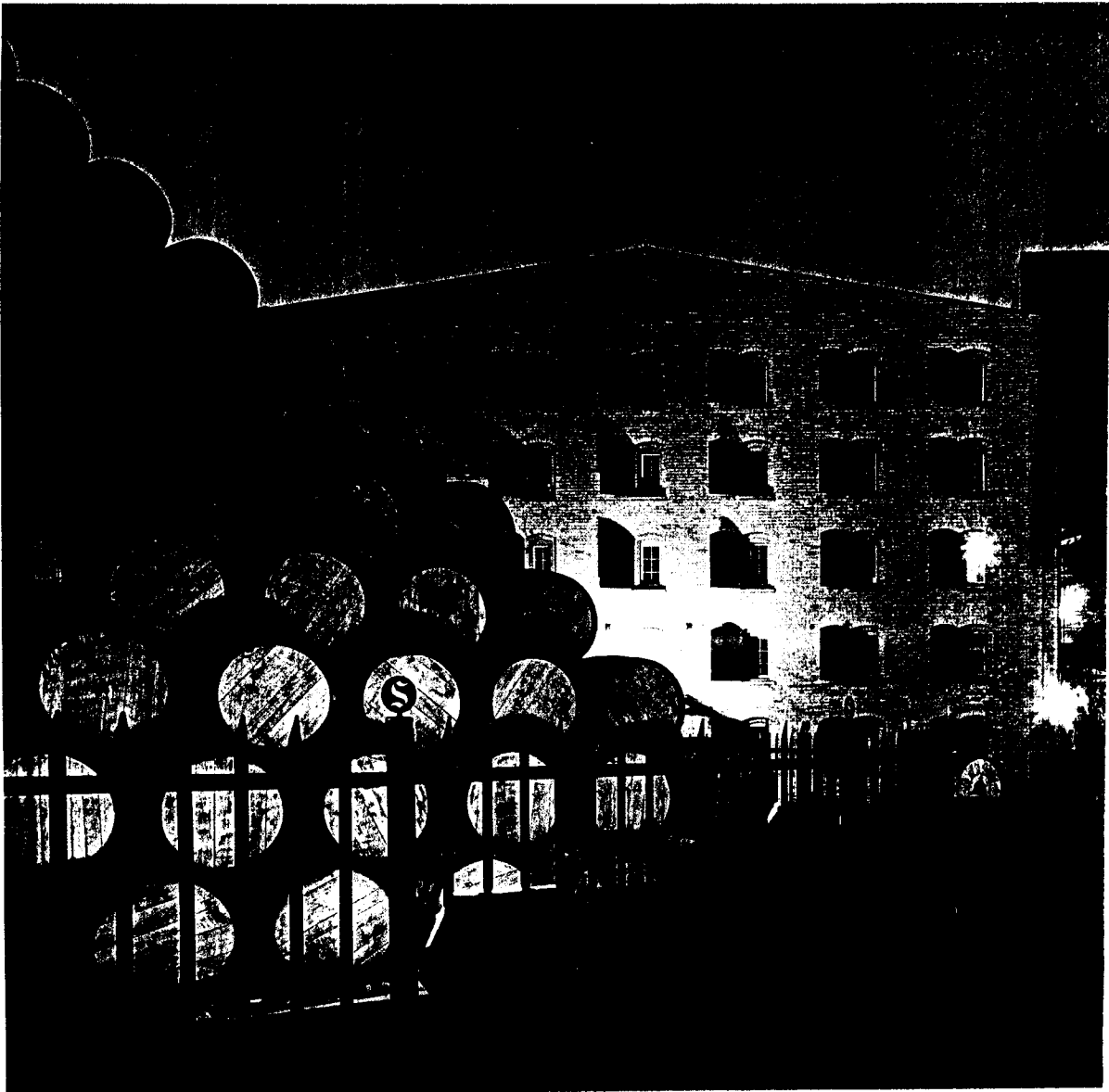
The museum previews Lejer's sculpture on the building's facade. An enormous colorful piece of his work is an integral part of the front elevation. By bringing the inside outside, the museum building functions as a backdrop to art; it is an element of display.



Grandville Island Renovation,  
Vancouver,  
Norman Hoston Architects, 1978-80

The water play area of the development provides a dynamic sign that announces a change in the pattern of use of the old wharf area.





The Seagram Museum Waterloo, Ontario  
Barton Myers Associates, Architects  
1983-84

The stack of barrels at the Seagram's arrival court serves as a massive, but elegant sign and a concrete tie to the main theme of the distillery museum.

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