



COWLES CONSERVATORY RENOVATION AT THE MINNEAPOLIS SCULPTURE GARDEN

The Minneapolis Sculpture Garden is one of the Twin Cities' most iconic destinations frequented by both tourists and locals. Central to the park's design as an open-air gathering space, cultural amenity, and gateway for the Walker Art Center, the Cowles Conservatory and Pavilion anchors the Garden's western edge, beckoning visitors to rest in the shade and take in the panorama of Downtown Minneapolis.

Design by Edward Larrabee Barnes and opened to the public in 1988—in tandem with the Garden—on former marshland, the Cowles Conservatory comprised two linear pavilions that connected to a central enclosed palm court, once home to Frank Gehry's Standing Glass Fish sculpture. The building could not easily accommodate community events and the installation and removal of artworks, brick pavers had settled into the subsoils, and the only restrooms serving the 11-acre park were outdated and housed within the Conservatory. The single-glazed greenhouse has become an operations and maintenance burden for joint owners Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board and the Walker.

The Conservatory's redesign doubled as a radical re-envisioning, with a dual focus on low-impact design and greater accessibility. The removal of the building's restrooms, storage blocks, and grade-level glass walls created three standalone open-air pavilions, while the removal of mechanical and electrical systems made the pavilions' skeletal steel frames more prominent. And with the inclusion of new LED lighting, the Conservatory's energy burden is negligible.

The project engaged issues of current strategies for artistic production and exhibition, environmental sustainability, urban connectivity, and city parks operations.

PROJECT INFORMATION

Location: Minneapolis, MN
Size: 8,000 sf (conservatory)
900 sf (restrooms/storage)
Cost: apx. \$1.5 million
Completion Date: 2017

REFERENCE

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New restroom facilities were positioned along the park's edge and clad in clouded stainless steel, allowing them to recede into the landscape.

These interventions by subtraction transformed the Conservatory into a series of gathering areas with seamless connections to the surrounding green space and sculpture displays.



Existing Conditions

