

Architecture at the Nasher

Teaching Resource

Nasher Sculpture Center

The Nasher Sculpture Center is home to the Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection of modern and contemporary sculpture. The Nashers began acquiring art in the mid-20th century and their collection evolved over the years to become one of the most extensive and prominent collections of sculpture in private hands. The Nasher is one of the only museums in the world dedicated to the exhibition, study, and preservation of modern and contemporary sculpture.

Planning the Museum

Raymond and Patsy Nasher wanted to make their collection available to the community and began to plan for a museum to display their sculptures in the 1990s. They considered several options.

Option One: Convert their Home into a Museum

The Nashers originally planned to turn their home into a museum. They found joy in living alongside art and sharing their collection with guests, but realized that their residential neighborhood would limit the number of potential visitors.

Option Two: Donate their Collection to a Museum

Their second option was to donate their collection to a museum. This would allow their artworks to be more accessible to the community. However, the Nashers wished to keep the collection together and ensure their sculptures would always be on view to the public.

Option Three: Build a New Museum

After careful consideration, the Nashers decided to build a sculpture museum in downtown Dallas across the street from the Dallas Museum of Art. This location would allow for close collaboration with the DMA and would be more accessible than a residential area.



Interior and grounds of the Nasher home prior to the opening of the Nasher Sculpture Center in 2003.

- Imagine you are an art collector and want to share your collection with the public. Which of the three options would you choose? What factors would influence your decision?

Architect

In 1999, Raymond Nasher selected Renzo Piano as the architect to design a space for the Nasher Collection. He admired Piano's architecture, especially the Menil Collection in Houston and the Beyeler Foundation in Switzerland. Piano approached each project with a clean and fresh vision for the space instead of focusing on his personal style.

- The Nasher Sculpture Center began construction in 2001 and opened in 2003.
- At a location that was originally a parking lot, Renzo Piano designed an elegant stone and glass building. He explained that he was offered the opportunity "to steal this piece of land from its normal destiny."
- Piano drew inspiration from the architecture of ancient Greek and Roman ruins.
- **Walk around and explore the space. Make a list of words to describe the mood, materials and atmosphere of the museum.**



Nasher Sculpture Center building seen from Garden



Roman ruins from Renzo Piano Workshop's inspiration board

Building Features

The front of the Nasher Sculpture Center has no curb or stairs. Piano wanted to create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere by placing the museum entrance at street level.

Ground Floor

The ground floor of the museum contains the entrance, three galleries, a store and a cafe, along with a boardroom and management offices.

Lower Level

The lower level contains a gallery for light-sensitive artwork, an auditorium, a classroom, offices, a conservation studio, art storage, a kitchen, and mechanical equipment.



Interior galleries of Nasher Sculpture Center with view of Garden.

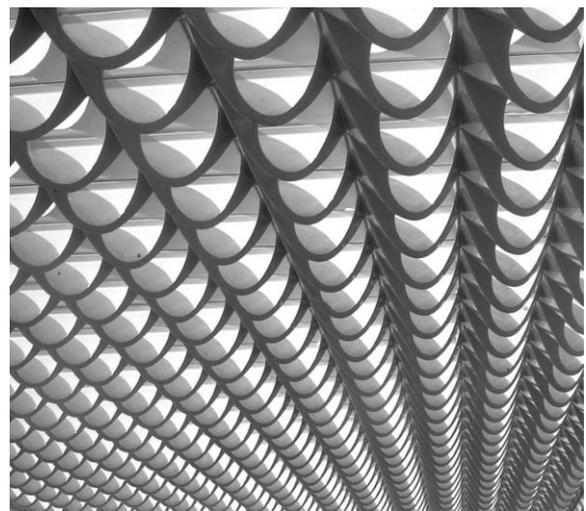
- Six walls of Italian travertine marble run north to south and divide the museum into five equal bays. The orientation of the walls allows for a clear and unobstructed view of the entire museum and garden.
- Each bay of the museum measures 16 feet high by 32 feet wide and the travertine blocks measure 4 feet by 2 feet, making use of a harmonious 2 to 1 ratio.
- When standing outside of the museum at street level, visitors can see through the glass windows all the way into the back of the garden. Piano chose this design to entice visitors to come in and explore the space.
- The interior walls are made of travertine that has been smoothed and filled in, creating a neutral background for viewing art. The exterior walls have been water blasted to emphasize the stone's porous and rough texture. The walls extend 14 feet past the glass windows of the galleries, merging the interior and exterior spaces.
- **Imagine you are an architect for a museum. What ideas and goals would guide your design? Who would your ideal client be? How would the desires of the client change your vision for the space? Make a sketch of your museum and discuss with the people around you.**

Roof

Renzo Piano had a vision for a museum without a roof: a space that would be filled with natural light. To achieve this, he designed aluminum panels with angled openings that would allow only northern light into the galleries. The aluminum panels protect the sculptures from direct sunlight and harmful UV rays.

This soft, natural light allows visitors to admire the surface, texture, and form of the sculptures. Raymond Nasher believed that sculpture should be seen from all sides and worked with Piano to create the perfect conditions for walking around and looking at sculpture.

- **Look up to the north, south, east, and west. In which direction does the aluminum sunscreen disappear, allowing you to see the sky? Spend some time walking around the gallery. Does the angle of the panels change or stay the same as you walk around?**



Nasher roof system

- The vaulted glass roof is supported by arched steel beams.
- Weight-bearing support bars on the outside of the building hold the glass in place.
- Each glass panel measures 4 feet by 16 feet and weighs 1,200 pounds.
- The heat trace beams supporting the glass panels can sense a change in temperature to prevent condensation.
- The glass panes were installed with a one-inch separation to allow for vertical movement up or down without breaking.

Garden

Landscape Architect Peter Walker designed the Nasher Garden to be an outdoor gallery, complementing Renzo Piano's concept of a "museum without a roof." Raymond Nasher's vision for this outdoor space was to create a serene and beautiful oasis for the contemplation and enjoyment of art.



Water features in Nasher Garden

Peter Walker initially envisioned an organic and winding layout for the garden. His goal was to echo the tranquility of the Nashers' backyard, where their sculptures were originally displayed. However, Walker ended up redesigning his plan for the garden to echo Piano's geometric and orderly building. As a result, the layout of the garden is very clean, geometric, and minimal.

- **How does the exterior of the Nasher Sculpture Center echo the interior?**

If you look closely you can see that the rows of trees line up with the walls of the museum. These trees create outdoor gallery spaces and a seamless flow between the galleries and garden.

- **If you were going to design a garden would your design be orderly and geometric or free and organic? How would you arrange the paths and plants to support your vision?**
- The water features running horizontally along the back of the garden serve to soften the noise and traffic of the city. They also contribute to a pleasant atmosphere by cooling the garden and providing peaceful background noise.
- Below the ground, layers of crushed fiberglass and sand are used to support the weight of the sculptures, some weighing up to 100,000 pounds.
- The garden has over 200 trees local to North Texas including crape myrtle, willow, cedar elm, and live oak.
- As you walk around, you will notice some of the paths end at the grass. This is to allow visitors to make their own pathways through the grass as they explore the garden.

Draw a map of your route as you explore and move through the Nasher Garden. You do not have to record everything you see on your map. You may choose to draw only the things that catch your attention. Make note of sounds, things that move, insects, and other creatures. After everyone in your group has finished with their map, compare your maps with each other. Notice how different your maps look from one another based on the things that captured your attention.

