

THE JOSLYN

ELLE DECOR

A Beloved Omaha Museum Gets a Makeover Worthy of Its Untamed Nebraska Setting

By Anna Fixsen

Elle Decor

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With a striking expansion by Snøhetta, plus an Art Deco and a Norman Foster–designed wing, the Joslyn Art Museum’s now a triple threat.



Nic Lehoux

When architect Craig Dykers and his team at Snøhetta were tapped to add a 42,000-square-foot wing to the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska, they received an odd question from most everyone they talked to: Would it be pink?

The good citizens of Omaha had reason to be curious. The original museum—a stately 1931 Art Deco masterpiece designed by father-and-son duo John and Alan McDonald—is covered entirely in Etowah Fleuri, a swirling, blush-colored marble quarried in northern Georgia. Lord Norman Foster, in his first-ever U.S. commission, followed suit in 1994 with a handsome addition clad in the same sumptuous stone.

Snøhetta's response? "We said no," Dykers says.

Instead, the architects aimed to create a wing that would not only celebrate its illustrious neighbors but also serve as an ode to the Nebraska landscape. "I like to talk about the existential side of design—that is, how does it make you feel? What is the spirit of this place?" Dykers says.



Nic Lehoux | A view of Foster + Partner's 1994 expansion, clad in blush-colored marble. The project marked Norman Foster's first U.S. commission. Snøhetta—whose landscape team was led by Michelle Delk—surrounded the buildings with native plants, like sumac and black-eyed susans.

Today, visitors will find out. After six years of design and construction, a reimagined Joslyn opens its doors to the public. Besides Snøhetta's soaring Rhonda & Howard Hawks Pavilion—which includes pristine new galleries, a community space, and a shop—there are new sculpture gardens swaying with native plants; a reconfigured arrival and entry sequence, tucked beneath an impressive cantilevered canopy; and surgical updates to the earlier buildings, including new administrative spaces, classrooms, a café, and more.



Nic Lehoux | The new wing sweeps between the Art Deco building and the Foster + Partners' 1994 expansion, creating a unified museum campus.

Crucially, the expansion allows the Joslyn to rethink its impressive collection of 12,000 objects (which range from ancient Greek vases to works on paper by Omaha native Ed Ruscha) and to acquire new ones. "This project is an opportunity for us to go to storage, to make some strategic acquisitions, diversify the collection, and show more of the collection," says Jack Becker, the museum's CEO and executive director.

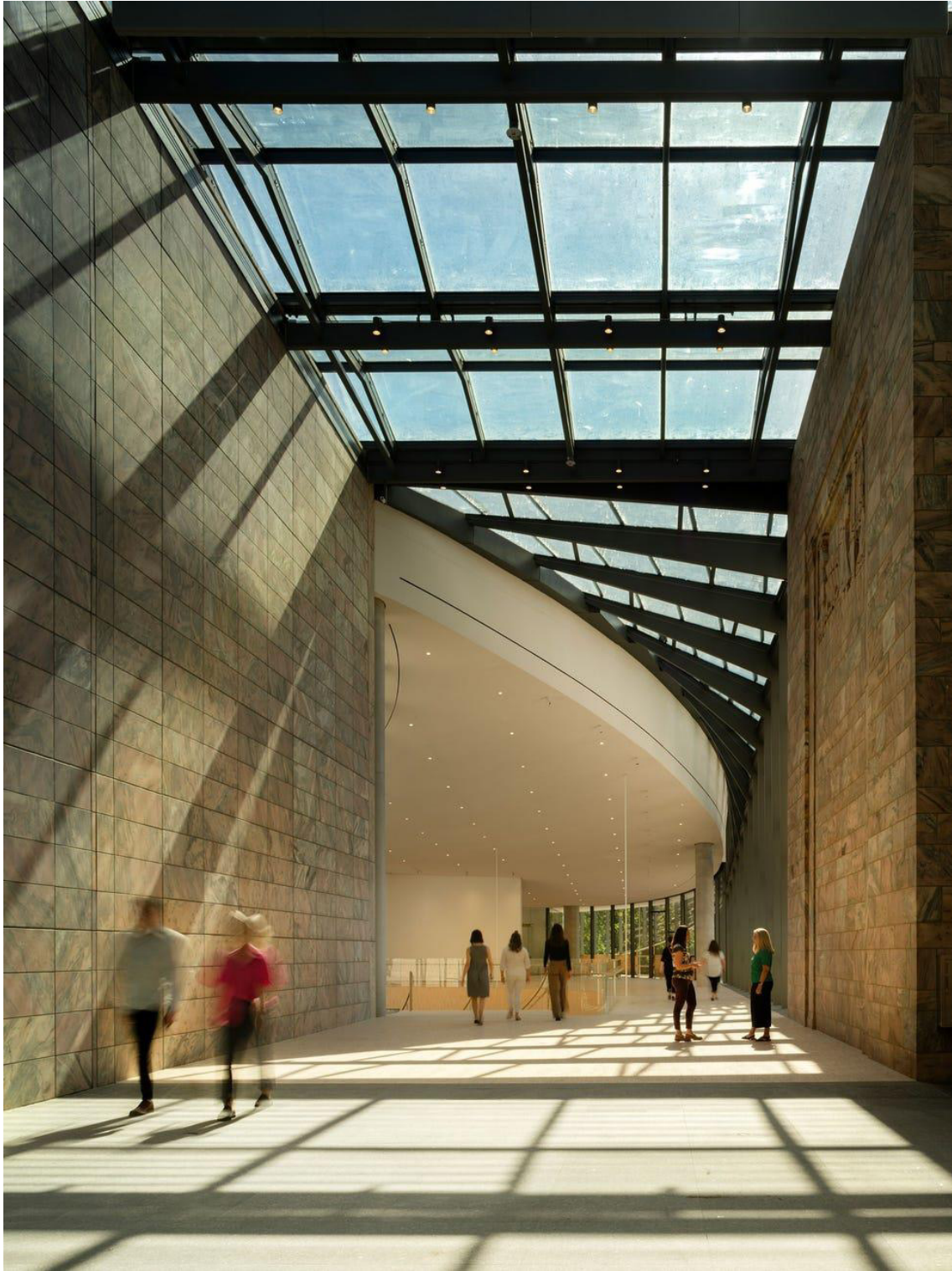
From the low-slung entry canopy, you are immediately pulled into a column-free, light-filled atrium, a classic "compression and release" design move pulled from Prairie School architecture. The two-level addition sweeps around and frames the existing structures, offering an architectural hug to its more muscular, rectilinear counterparts.



Nic Lehoux | A curved staircase leads to the Joclyn's upper levels. To the left, are the new galleries. To the right, visitors can enter the original 1931 Joslyn building or Foster's Scott Pavilion.

Dykers—who first visited Nebraska in the early '80s to visit an ex-girlfriend—was particularly struck by the buoyant cumulonimbus clouds that rolled over the landscape. “The weather in Nebraska is quite special,” he says. “If you’re looking out across the fields, you *know* a storm is coming. [The clouds] can be really extreme things, and they just have an enormous sense of power and color. Not many people get to feel it. So if you look at the building and you walk around today, all these swoops and swirls and shapes are bringing people a sort of hint of what it’s like to be in the Nebraska landscape.”

For Becker and chief curator Taylor Acosta, the revitalized museum also provided an opportunity to reconceive the collections in a way that was unique to the region. In fact, for the first time in its 93-year-history, the collection in the original Art Deco building has been reinstalled with a renewed focus on the Great Plains region and the work of indigenous artists. “We didn’t want to be the Met ‘light,’” Acosta says.



Nic Lehoux | Visitors pass through a skylit passageway on the museum's upper level to access both the old and new galleries.

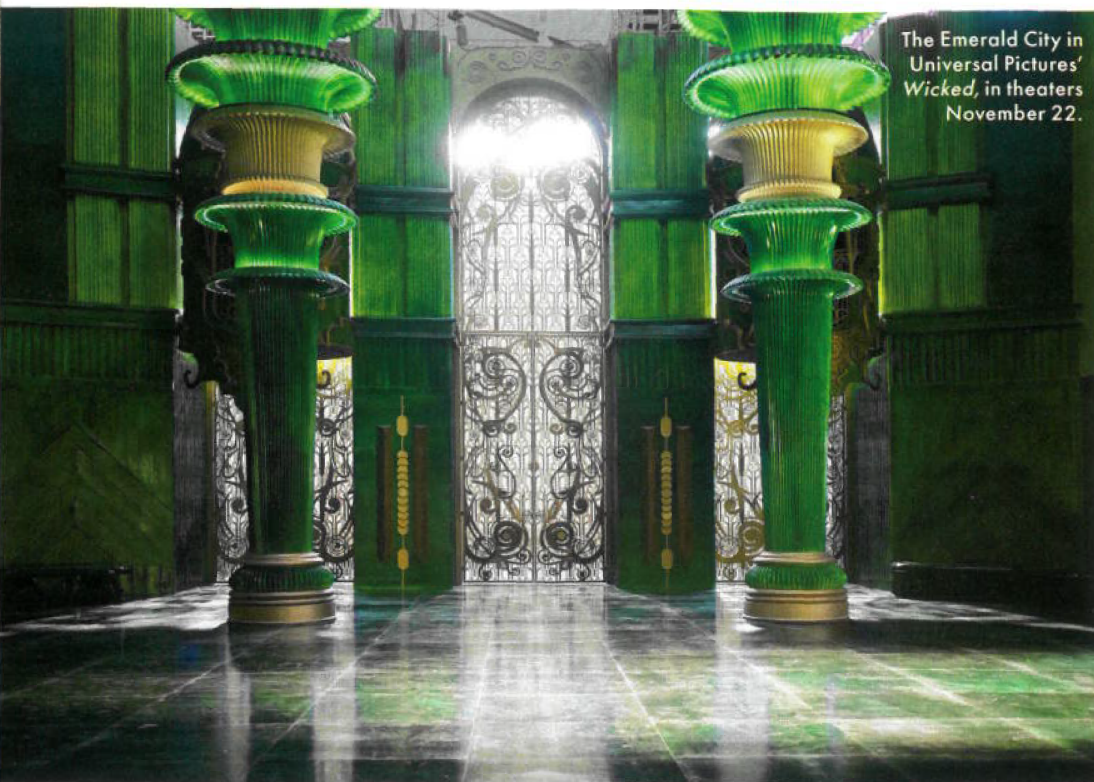
There have also been more than 100 new acquisitions and commissions, including works by Simone Leigh, Hank Willis Thomas, Dyani White Hawk, and Eva LeWitt. The most significant addition is the 52 artworks comprising the Phillip Schrager Collection, displayed in the upper-level galleries of Snøhetta's new Hawks Pavilion. The artworks on view range from Pop Art to Abstract Expressionism, from conceptual to contemporary, and—under diffused natural light—can be enjoyed by the public for free.



Nic Lehoux | Inside the new Rhonda & Howard Hawks Pavilion, which displays contemporary works. Snøhetta designed a clever system of skylights to bring soft daylight into the galleries.

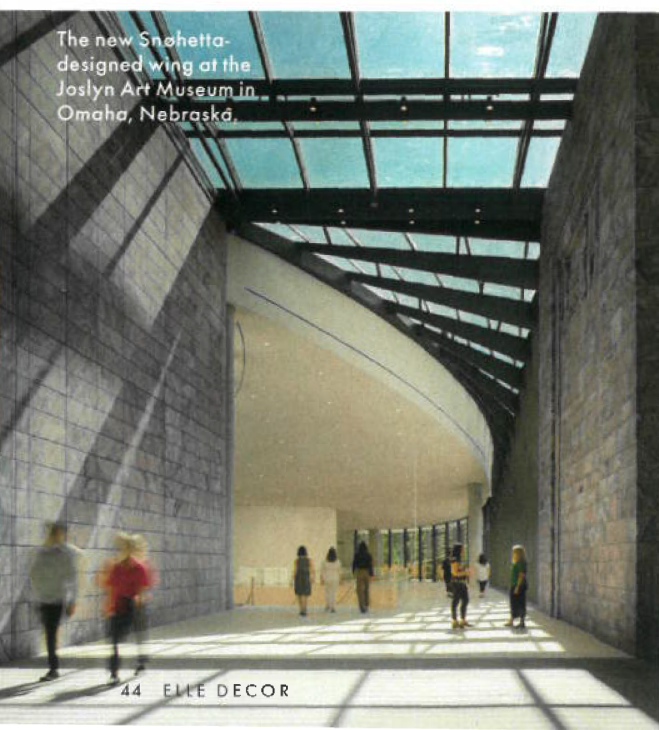
Still, amid all the new, there are nods to that original pink. If you look closely at the pre-cast panels that make up the facade, you can spy salmon-colored flecks in the aggregate—tiny particles of Etowah Fleuri marble. Back in the soaring lobby, Dykers jokes as he looks over the space, “I don’t feel that people are saying, ‘Ooh, they messed it up.’”

<https://www.elledecor.com/life-culture/travel/a62122389/joslyn-art-museum-omaha/>



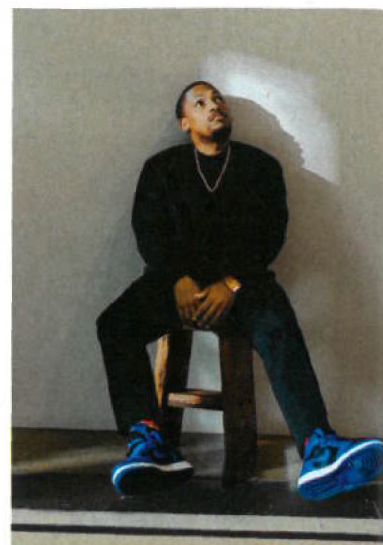
WATCH GREEN DREAM

For this fall's stage-to-screen adaptation of **Wicked**, helmed by *In the Heights* director Jon M. Chu, production designer Nathan Crowley envisioned a fantastical world with a distinctly American flavor. From wide-open plains and fields of barley (a nod to the work of Andrew Wyeth) to the vaulted arches of the library at Shiz University (drawn from New York City's Grand Central station), this Oz "is an American fairy tale," says Crowley. Fittingly, when witches Elphaba (Cynthia Erivo) and Glinda (Ariana Grande) follow the yellow brick road to the Emerald City—inspired by Chicago's neoclassical White City, built for the 1893 World's Fair—it's both "wondrous," says Crowley, "and scary." —Ingrid Abramovitch wickedmovie.com



VISIT WAY OUT MIDWEST

Snøhetta cofounder Craig Dykers likes to talk about the "existential" side of design: how it makes a person feel. His firm has swung for the emotional rafters with the six-years-in-the-making, 42,000-square-foot expansion of the **Joslyn Art Museum** in Omaha, Nebraska. The soaring Rhonda & Howard Hawks Pavilion builds upon the museum's world-class architectural heritage—a 1994 addition was Lord Norman Foster's first U.S. commission—and sits comfortably alongside revamped sculpture gardens and more than 100 new acquisitions and commissions, including works by Ed Clark, Eva LeWitt, and Hank Willis Thomas. —Anna Fixsen joslyn.org



MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Columnar Disorder

Chicago

Architect and artist **Germane Barnes** (above) opens his first solo museum exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago, through January 27. The show wrenches the central forms of classical architecture—the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders—out of the Western lexicon and transposes the African diasporic experience onto them. artic.edu

Fischersund: Faux Flora

Seattle

For his second project with the National Nordic Museum, **Jónsi**, the multidisciplinary artist and lead vocalist of Icelandic band Sigur Rós, has conceived an immersive installation exploring rare and imaginary fauna of the Nordic regions. Open November 8 through January 26, it promises to be an outright feast for every sense. nordicmuseum.org

Christofle, a Brilliant Story

Paris

In a first for the nearly 200-year-old company, **Maison Christofle** will be the focus of a retrospective at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, from November 13 through April 20. The exhibition will recount the French silversmith's historic role in bringing silver dinnerware from royal banquets to the tables of the middle class. madparis.fr —Camille Okhio

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