

THE JOSLYN MIDLANDS **Business Journal**

A Work of Art: Career-defining work lands Morrissey Engineering major award

by Dwain Hebda | Photography By Debra S. Kaplan
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Jason Eickmeier (left) and Andrew Lang of Morrissey Engineering brought home top honors for their work on The Joslyn.
Debra S. Kaplan

When visitors and patrons got their first look last September at the long-awaited second expansion of The Joslyn — two years and \$100 million in the making — they marveled at the architecture, the massive windows flooding interior spaces with light, and the seamlessly graceful manner in which the new section redefined the beloved art museum’s existing structure.

Few, it must be said, likely commented on the project's mechanical systems, lighting or how it was all engineered to a level of sustainability and efficiency worthy of LEED Gold certification.

Ironically, the fact people didn't notice the air ducts and miles of electrical accoutrement in the walls — and still don't ---- is something of a compliment, at least as far as Andrew Lang is concerned.

“Obviously the stakes were very high,” said Lang, a partner with Morrissey Engineering and electrical project manager for the high-profile addition. “The museum specifically had goals of this being an iconic piece of architecture for Omaha, which made designing the building systems within that very complicated. It required a lot of interdisciplinary coordination and a lot of creativity to make our stuff be in the background and not distracting from the design of the building.



From left, Jason Eickmeier, Joslyn Executive Director and CEO Jack Becker and Andrew Lang.

Debra S. Kaplan

“Also, being trusted to provide a safe environment for an irreplaceable, priceless art collection, which was our first responsibility, set a pretty high bar of excellence right there.”

Challenge accepted

As if those details weren't anxiety-inducing enough, Lang also noted the onset of the pandemic added another level of complexity to what was already a far-flung project of daunting complexity.

**The Joslyn is a visitor-centered cultural institution.
The collaboration with Morrissey on our expansion
ensured the optimal environment for art and people.**

- JACK BECKER, JOSLYN ART MUSEUM
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & CEO

“It was a very interesting process actually, because the main design architect was the New York City office of Snøhetta and there was a structural engineer firm in Seattle,” he said. “We had a lighting designer from New York. We had a façade consultant from New York. So, a very big, complicated team that spread all over the country.

“We were maybe 35% of the way through the design process before COVID-19 struck and before that everyone was coming to Omaha to meet every so often. [The pandemic] shut that down and really pushed us into a virtual collaboration, which we all sort of learned on the fly.”

The resulting 42,000-square-foot expansion project is breathtaking, offering new gallery spaces, atrium and redesigned exterior public garden spaces. Lang takes particular pride in the exacting details of the work which was successfully orchestrated virtually during the planning and design phase.

**UNVEILED LAST SEPTEMBER, JOSLYN'S STUNNING EXPANSION
TOOK TWO YEARS AND COST \$100 MILLION.**



“We spent a lot of time looking at 3D models with everyone’s stuff in it and talking through how each piece comes together,” he said. “We were not only coordinating internally but with architects who are out-of-town and a structural engineering team that included an out-of-town and an Omaha structural engineer.

“There’s things that all had to be coordinated to the quarter inch so that when they made the steel beam, the holes are in the right spot for the duct to go through it. That occurs everywhere in that building.”

Award winning

The general public may not appreciate what it took for Morrissey Engineering to pull off this complicated feat — in addition to electrical under Lang, the firm also handled mechanical engineering duties under project leader Jason Eickmeier — but the industry has sat up and taken notice. The firm took home the Grand Award from the Nebraska chapter of the American Council of Engineering Companies and is in the running for a similar accolade at the national level.

Among the many other things that stand out about the project is its focus on sustainability, a requirement which has, in a relatively short time period, become a priority for clients across the board, Lang said.

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- ANDREW LANG, PARTNER,
MORRISSEY ENGINEERING

“[Joslyn officials] made the point that they wanted it to be the most sustainable museum in the state of Nebraska,” he said. “It’s been a really interesting trend overall. Take something like LED lighting which, obviously these days is the standard, the baseline expectation. The Nebraska History Museum was a project I worked on only 10 years ago and I distinctly remember that was the first building that I designed that was 100% LED. Everything up until then included fluorescent tubes and this mishmash of different things.

“Since then, for our firm specifically, sustainability has been one of the core principles of what we do. We believe in it strongly and we’ve tried to educate clients on it to varying degrees of interest. What we’re seeing now is the sophistication of questions that we are getting from clients is getting better. They’re asking about things like beneficial electrification and indoor air quality before we even have a chance to bring it up. It’s definitely something people are more aware of and having these conversations helps us advance sustainability in our industry.”

A thriving industry

Omaha is a prime breeding ground for this kind of innovation, be it in sustainability or some other aspects of engineering, Lang said, thanks to the presence of several major engineering firms. This environment helps attract and retain young talent and while it’s a very competitive marketplace it’s also one that has a national reputation within the engineering field.

“In engineering, we obviously rely heavily on the right people and so recruiting talent is a key business success factor,” he said. “We have great partners at the University of Nebraska, where we have been very active in hiring. I came from that program, a lot of our firm did. Omaha is a very engineering-heavy city because there are several very large firms headquartered here, so competition for people is very great.”

“That creates a lot of great opportunity for students and people in the industry but it also creates a demand that is higher than it otherwise would be for a city of our size. So, we regularly look to surrounding states to recruit people to come to Omaha. We’re always looking to maximize the available talent pool.”