

The Renzo Piano-designed New Wing of Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

By Motoo Komoda

The Boston Museum of Fine Arts may be the dominant museum many people associate with the U.S. city of Boston, Massachusetts, but the nearby Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum also deserves high acclaim. I must confess that until I began work on “the Gardner”, I knew almost nothing about this museum except that if I mentioned the name to my American friends, some of them would passionately reply, “Oh, I love that museum!”

History and Highlights of the Gardner Museum

Isabella Stewart Gardner, one of the only female arts patrons at the turn of the 20th century, conceived the vision for the Gardner and brought this historic museum

into being in 1903, with the public opening taking place on New Year’s Day of that year. Visitors to the Gardner are often particularly drawn to the landscaped garden of plants, sculpture and architectural detail in the interior courtyard, which is both protected and lit by a large glass skylight. The original building has three floors and visitors find here both serenity and visual splendor while browsing through the historic building and its collections.

The Gardner houses a world-class art collection and also sponsors concerts, lectures and other events in keeping with Isabella Stewart Gardner’s vision of a museum “for the education and enrichment of the public forever”. Beginning in 2012, the Gardner’s activities also includes the biennial Maeder-York museum fellowship in landscape studies. In 1990, the Gardner made news headlines when thieves stole 13 valuable works of art, including Vermeer and Rembrandt paintings. In cooperation with the FBI and the U.S. Attorney’s Office, an investigation into the theft continues with a focus on recovery of these precious works of art.

The Renzo Piano-designed New Wing and Calderwood Performance Hall

In 2002, in keeping with the vision and endowment of the museum’s founder, the museum embarked on a project to add a new wing to relieve the pressure of more than 200,000 annual visitors on the original museum building. In 2004, the museum named Renzo Piano to be the new wing’s architect. The new wing includes space for the exhibition and fostering of contemporary art and landscape gardens as well as a performance hall, expanded amenities such as a café, a greenhouse for plants and apartments for the use of artists in residence. The overall budget for



Figure 1: The Renzo Piano-designed wing of Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

the project was in the range of \$114 million. Nagata Acoustics served as the acoustical consultant for Calderwood Performance Hall.

The new performance hall seats an audience of almost 300 persons and is designed primarily for the performance of classical music. The hall has a square-shaped stage surrounded on all four sides by audience seating. Just as the original museum's interior courtyard has a skylight high above it in the third floor's roof, so the new performance hall's architectural design includes a skylight in its high ceiling. The skylight brings natural light into the performance hall.

The performance hall has a nearly cube-shaped spatial configuration. At stage level, only two rows of seating surround the stage. On the three balcony levels, the four sides of the perimeter have just one row of seating on each side. At stage level, the stage and the audience are at the same eye level, so that the audience sits and listens to performances in extreme proximity to the performers. The single row of balcony seats in the three balcony tiers effectively turns these seats into box seats where patrons can freely lean forward on the handrail or otherwise position themselves at ease without impacting the experience of other members of the audience. Also, compared with standard concert hall per-seat spatial volumes, each audience seat has slightly more generous space than the norm.

Overall, every seat in the hall provides a luxurious, VIP experience. At the same time, because the audience members face each other at rather close distance, the hall feels less like a concert venue and somewhat more like a small theatre for social events where the theatre design has been pursued to an almost radical extreme. The glass surface on the ceiling and the glass detail of the hall's handrails add to the uniqueness of this concert hall's design.

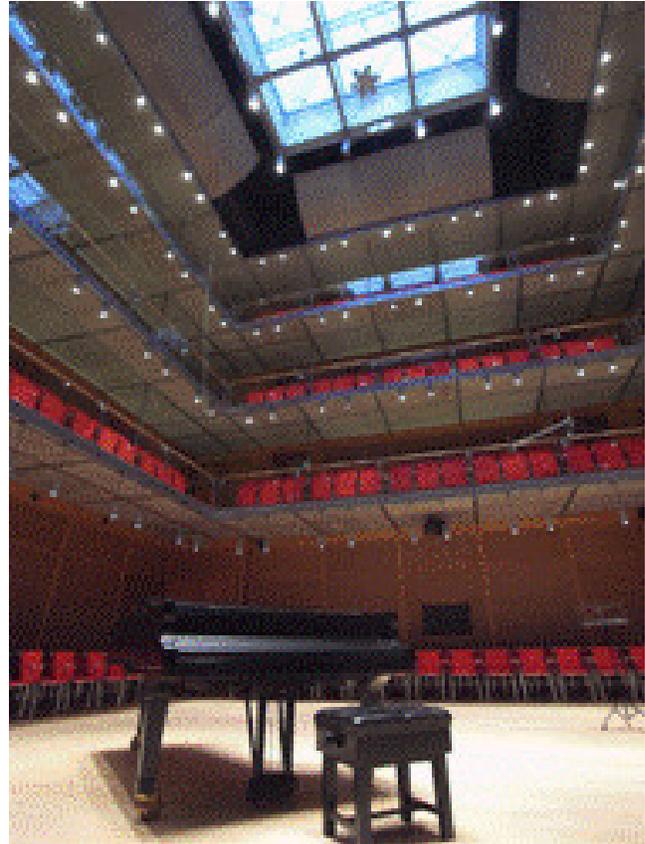


Figure 2: Interior of Calderwood Performance Hall Main Floor View

Calderwood Performance Hall Opening Concert

Calderwood Performance Hall and the Museum officially opened to the public on Wednesday, January 18, 2012 after a weekend of opening concerts to begin the hall's inaugural concert season. I had the pleasure of attending the four nights of incredible concerts starring some of the world's most well-known musical artists, such as Kiri Te Kanawa and Yo-Yo Ma. Performing ensembles included Borromeo String Quartet and Jupiter String Quartet. In addition, the young, dazzling pianists Jeremy Denk and Paavali Jumppanen performed as did A Far Cry, the museum's Chamber Orchestra in Residence.

Additional Information

The museum captured the progress of the Renzo Piano-designed new wing project in photos, videos and words and shares them at the [Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum: Building on a Legacy website](#).

The inaugural events followed close on the heels of the project's completion and we decided to postpone acoustical measuring in the hall until after the inaugural celebrations. Just prior to publishing this newsletter, we completed the post-project acoustical measuring activities. At a future opportunity, I will write about the hall's acoustics and the measurement results.



Figure 3: Interior of Calderwood Performance Hall Balcony View Includes Audience