

PROMONTORIO

NEW MOTE AQUARIUM
FLORIDA, USA
2016

Based in Sarasota, Florida, and founded in 1955 Mote Marine Laboratory is one of North America's leading not-for-profit marine research organizations. Since 1978, the lab and its public outreach arm, Mote Aquarium, has expanded to include a 10.5-acre (4.2 ha) campus in the now highly congested area of the City Island of Sarasota Bay. The combined success of the aquarium in terms of visitors with the need to expand lab facilities, besides staff and scholar accommodations, places a limit on the building capacity of the existing campus. This prompted the decision to look for an alternative location for the New Mote Aquarium, which ultimately culminated in East Sarasota, in the nearby Natham Benderson Park, a 600-acre community park located next to a large commercial and mixed-use development which includes a Mall already built and in operation (the Mall at University Town) in addition to a series of planned office buildings, residential, hotels and other facilities crisscrossed by water canals that flow from the adjacent lake of the rowing course. The proposed site for the aquarium is on the northwest edge of an artificial lake surrounded by a large parking lot.

The proposed master plan has 3 key components: an aquarium, a hotel with conference center and a botanical garden. Visitors can park on a dedicated area on the northwest edge of the lake, or simply come from the adjacent parking of the nearby Mall at UTC. From there, a waterfront promenade has been devised to create a continuous landscaping experience from the Southwest outdoor auditorium, onto the ticketing plaza from where the light pedestrian bridge that connects to the aquarium sets off. Both the Hotel & Conference Center have their drop-off on the North perimeter street while their south façade faces the lake and the view to the aquarium. Although the botanical garden is also accessible through this street, this entrance is mostly for service and maintenance, given that its main public access is through a dramatic underground passageway from the aquarium plaza that leads visitors to resurfaces in a spectacular "Moses" walk-on-water.

Placed in a recessed plaza surrounded from all sides by water, the aquarium will be seemingly unreachable, other than by a light pedestrian bridge. Visitors will reach the building by crossing this bridge over the lake and enter the building directly at the second floor and from here they will have a first glimpse of the sunken plaza, given that the building is implanted one floor below the water level of the lake. The aquarium architectural concept, is inspired on the whirlpool movement based on the principle of offering visitors an all-surrounding experience. The exhibit circuit evolves through four levels, around a full height central tank. The proposed exhibit circuit has 7 main themes/ habitats, two by floor. This circuit is interlaced, half of the circuit is done rising on escalators and the other half descending on a single way. Two main lobbies, with 4-story height, separate the different habitats of the exhibition circuit. These stepped voids, crossed by escalators and stairs, express the rotation movement of the whirlpool offering visitors a truly three-dimensional travel experience. Within these atriums, light glows from the central tank windows, creating an exciting atmosphere that turns the voids into visual extensions of the central tank. Inspired by the metaphor of the tropical mangrove, as seen across Florida's marshlands, the façade of the aquarium has a detached wood structure, that emphasizes the rotation movement. Like a second skin, suggestive of the mangroves' intricate weaving pattern, this structure overlaps the exterior escape stairs and other mechanical elements like, chillers, ducts, pipes and grills, that exist both in the façade and roof. This way, the building maintains a strong image and clean silhouette with optimized mechanical accessibility. Finally, the water plaza, located on the first floor is an outdoor recreational and leisure space that connects to the cafeteria. Surrounded by a continuous waterfall, equipped with mist water nozzles scattered on the stone pavement, generates a fresh and playful atmosphere. Walking through a misty plaza will be a delightful experience for a breakout before proceeding into the next experience – the botanical garden.

Location: Sarasota, Florida FL

Client: Mote Marine Laboratory

Programme: Aquarium, water plaza, botanical garden and 150-keys 4-star hotel with conference centre

Gross Construction Area: 7,800 sq. m (aquarium), 8,670 sq. m (hotel and conference centre) and 1,3 hectares (botanical garden)

Estimated Construction Cost: USD 56,8M

Project Status: 2016 (shortlist invitation – master plan/ concept design)