Thank you for visiting the Milwaukee Art Museum. We hope you come back soon to explore more of the great art inside.

Quadracci Pavilion Architectural Team
Design Architect: Santiago Calatrava, Spain
Architect of Record: David Kahler, Milwaukee
Cudahy Gardens Landscape Architect: Dan Kiley, Boston

Milwaukee Art Museum Architects
2001 addition: Santiago Calatrava
1975 addition: David Kahler
1957: Eero Saarinen

National Media Attention
Best Design of 2001
—TIME Magazine
One of the five most important buildings of the 21st Century
—USA Today
In 2002, named one of the “New Wonders of the World”
—Conde Nast Traveler Magazine
In 2010, named Best Project of the Decade
—Milwaukee Business Journal

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Red, Blue, Black: Front Room Photography
Windhover Hall: Timothy Hursley
Galleries: Timothy Hursley
Museum Store: Timothy Hursley
Parking Garage: Timothy Hursley


“Rather than just add something to the existing buildings, I also wanted to add something to the lakefront. I have, therefore, worked to infuse the building with a certain sensitivity to the culture of the lake—the boats, the sails, and the always changing landscape.”
—Santiago Calatrava
Burke Brise Soleil

The ultimate Milwaukee show-off for out-of-towners, the Burke Brise Soleil is a moveable, winglike sunscreen composed of seventy-two steel fins that open and close with the Museum. The best spot to watch the “wings” is from the middle of the pedestrian bridge. Wings open Tuesday–Sunday at 10 a.m., close/reopen at noon, and close again at 5 p.m. (Thursdays at 8 p.m.). This schedule is subject to change due to weather or maintenance. The brise soleil has a wingspan comparable to a Boeing 747, but ultrasonic wind sensors automatically close the wings if the wind speed reaches 23 mph or greater. Unlike the airplane, the Museum prefers to remain on the ground.

Quadracci Pavilion

It started with a dream—and an architect’s watercolor sketch of a winged structure perched on the shores of Lake Michigan. In 1994, Spanish architect, artist, and engineer Santiago Calatrava (b. 1951) was chosen to design an addition to the Milwaukee Art Museum, his first building in the United States. The Quadracci Pavilion opened in October 2001, blending cutting-edge technology with Milwaukee’s strong artisan tradition. Calatrava’s unprecedented design responds to the topography of the city and the lake, and has become both an icon for the Museum and for the City of Milwaukee.

Welcome to the Milwaukee Art Museum. You are standing in our largest work of art, the Quadracci Pavilion.

Alexander Calder

Red, Black, Blue, 1968–73

Santiago Calatrava designed a spectacular building, to host spectacular art exhibitions. But the architect spotted one work at the Milwaukee County Airport that he wanted as the permanent, signature piece at the entrance to the Museum.

Alexander Calder’s mobile, on long-term loan to the Museum from the County, echoes beautifully the design in both the cylindrical glass elevator and circular opening in the floor below. Calder and Calatrava are certainly kindred spirits in that they both embrace engineering to bring their art to life.

Reiman Pedestrian Bridge

The wings steal the show, but while you’re watching them do their thing, don’t miss what’s underfoot! Connecting the Museum to its community, this 280-foot pedestrian bridge is suspended from 3,300 feet of locked coil cables, which are attached to a large mast and serve to counterbalance the weight of the pavilion. Calatrava first gained architectural acclaim in Europe for designing and engineering bridges similar to this. Weighting this bridge are Wisconsin granite pavers; Calatrava used the rock as a neighborly nod to the granite base of the War Memorial to the north, which architect Eero Saarinen designed in 1957.

Windhover Hall

The name “Windhover” comes from one of donor Harry Quadracci’s favorite poems: “The Windhover” (publ. 1918) by Gerard Manley Hopkins, which marvels at the bird’s mastery of hovering in the air.

Talk about making an entrance. It’s a cathedral! A ship! A bird! Windhover Hall stirs the imagination. Experience a postmodern gothic cathedral with flying buttresses, pointed arches, and ribbed vaults supporting the 90-foot-high glass ceiling; or the prow of a grand ship about to set sail. Notice how the white surfaces and floor-to-ceiling windows reflect the expansive lake and sky outside, sending shimmering light across the acre of marble floor from Carrara, Italy. Is this evocative space sending shivers down your spine yet? Don’t worry, beneath the marble lies six miles of PVC tubing that circulates water for eco-friendly heating and cooling to keep you perfectly comfortable.

Baumgartner Galleria and Schroeder Foundation Galleria

Take a stroll down the two arched promenades. It’s hard to top those great views of downtown Milwaukee to the west and Lake Michigan to the east, but this is also the best place to see the building’s handmade craftsmanship! Look closely at each of the arches; these were crafted by pouring concrete into one-of-a-kind wooden forms. Calatrava credits the Milwaukee firm C.G. Schmidt for perfectly executing his demanding specifications. Unlike the heating system hidden beneath the marble floor, the steel joints at the base of each rib are purposely exposed.

Interestingly, the joinery where Coffee With A Conscious is located was too complex for architectural computer plans, and a scaled model had to be built by hand to guide final construction. Stop and marvel over a cup of joe.

Museum Store

Are you starting to notice that Calatrava is all about the details? Case in point, his design of these stunning cantilevered display cases in the Museum Store. Produced by Hobel in Zurich and completed on-site by two Swiss craftsmen, each case (made of pearwood, glass, and steel) contains forty fans to cool the interior Tivoli lights, which add extra sparkle to all those tempting treasures inside.

And speaking of shopping: check out the excellent books about the architect available for purchase in the Museum Store.

Parking Garage

Could this be the world’s greatest parking garage? This space, too, is signature Calatrava—and temperature controlled for your comfort! There is the rhythm of the repeated, handcrafted architectural ribs, painted white to emphasize their form, and the continuing visual connection to the surrounding landscape. Santiago Calatrava has one more surprise for us. Take a moment to walk over to those skylights along the outer walls and look up. Like a periscope, the building’s design reflects the lake on one side and the downtown skyline on the other—just a little reminder that great art, like this building, has many layers to discover.