



Photos by Dennis Wise courtesy of Burke Museum

## Burke opening Saturday

By JOURNAL STAFF

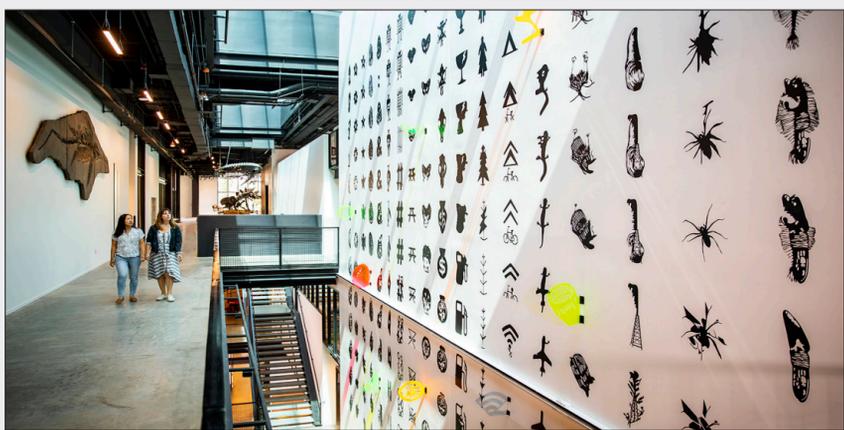
Although the new \$99 million Burke Museum of Natural History & Culture was finished a year ago, it has taken a meticulous move-in process since then to get its artifacts and displays ready for the public opening on Saturday.

The new building is just west of the museum's old building, at 4300 15th Ave. N.E. on the University of Washington campus. Museum officials expect it to be an inviting entry point to the campus, and to draw visitors from the U District light rail station, which is under construction less than two blocks away.

To celebrate the opening, the museum is holding several events, including a preview today for indigenous peoples, a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Friday followed by a preview for members and donors, and a kids' day on Sunday. The grand opening on Saturday will be held 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and will have singers, dancers, poets, DJs and food trucks.

### Project team

- Olson Kundig
- Evidence Design
- Gustafson Guthrie Nichol
- Magnusson Klemencic Associates
- WSP
- Stantec
- Skanska
- McKinstry
- View Dynamic Glass
- Walt Crimm Associates
- Renate Group
- Pacific Studio
- Oxbow Farm & Conservation Center
- Cetacea



This is an early design process illustration of the new Burke Museum.

Olson Kundig/Stephanie Bower Architectural Illustration

## On display at the Burke: a new model for museum design

■ Burke's "inside-out" design dissolves barriers between visitors, researchers and artifacts, while inviting the outside in.

By CATE O' TOOLE

Olson Kundig

The new Burke Museum of Natural History & Culture only moved about 400 feet from where the previous facility stood for 55 years, but it represents a bold progression in museum design.

Tom Kundig, principal and owner of Olson Kundig, designed the new Burke Museum. As a UW student, Kundig knew the original Burke as an introverted campus building. Its prime location at the northwest corner of campus aspired to link the UW with the surrounding community. Instead the museum's architectural language turned inward, its entrance hard to identify and the surrounding parking lot uninviting.

When he interviewed for the project in summer 2009, Kundig was already envisioning a building with a more significant presence. Reorienting the Burke along the site's 15th Avenue edge, he reasoned, would allow for a larger museum. The move would also create a new outdoor space for the Burke and surrounding UW buildings, and help the museum more directly engage with off-campus neighbors.

His ideas resonated with Burke Museum Executive Director Dr. Julie K. Stein, who dreamed of

a facility that displayed more of the museum's collections and operations. Stein's vision for the new Burke established two parallel agendas: an open and inviting "inside-out" museum where delicate artifacts would still be protected and safely stored.

"We had to do more than just build a bigger box with good air conditioning," Stein says. "People's reactions to going behind the scenes are magic. We had to do something to create that magic for everyone who visits the Burke, not just the select few who get a behind-the-scenes tour."

Despite a clear guiding vision and community support, the new Burke Museum progressed slowly for several years. Mary Dunnam (a past president of the museum's board) and Ellen Ferguson (co-chair of the campaign for the New Burke) helped Stein shepherd the project through bureaucratic hurdles and funding freezes.

"It got dicey, but they were never rattled," Kundig says. "The tireless perseverance and optimism of these three women is the reason this museum exists."

After nearly a decade of work — spanning design, fundraising, construction and methodological transfer of the Burke's collections — the new facility opens to the public on Oct. 12.

### FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

The architecture of the Burke Museum merges quiet form with ultra-efficient function. Simple floor plans provide 66% more area for ongoing research and display of the museum's 16 million artifacts, with controlled areas for sensitive pieces or items not available for public view. Each space is designed for flexibility, giving the museum the ability to adjust to the changing needs of its inventory.

"As an active collection museum, the Burke is moving and growing all the time," Kundig says. "So we designed its new building to be easy to rearrange and reorganize as collections grow and shift inside, as well as for potential future expansion."

The Burke Museum's quiet architecture nevertheless makes a big impact, thanks to widespread interior transparency. The open, linear dimensions of the Burke's floor plan allow visitors to easily navigate collections, following a natural progression through museum spaces. A large central atrium capped by an intelligent View Dynamic Glass skylight floods the interior with daylight without exposing collec-

tions to sun damage.

Throughout the museum, traditional barriers between museum visitor and researcher are dissolved; instead almost every part of the Burke's ongoing work is exposed as part of a holistic visitor experience. Research labs, which allow visitors to engage directly with working researchers, coexist across the museum with display collections by exhibit designer Evidence Design.

Extensive collaboration with tribal and indigenous communities throughout design and exhibit planning — including a Native American advisory board made up of statewide tribal leaders — helps this increased public access to collections remain respectful and culturally sensitive.

Kundig calls this a "Swiss cheese" strategy: "We've poked holes into various parts and pieces of the Burke," he says. "But there are still opaque, protected areas for pieces of the collection that it isn't safe or appropriate to display."

### VIEWS OUT, VIEWS IN

The Burke Museum hopes that allowing guests to take part in the process of scientific discovery will inspire them to consider their own personal connections to the natural world. The building provides opportunities to make these connections literal. From the cafe, a 24-foot-by-20-foot pivoting window wall opens directly onto the new Burke Yard. Led by Shannon Nichol of Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, the Burke Yard provides a multipurpose event space and thousands of native plants, revitalizing the site of the old Burke.

The building's exterior design centers the Burke Museum within its cultural and environmental context. The Burke's sloping roofline nods to a shed roof as it follows the topography of 15th Avenue Northeast, linking the building to its surrounding landscape. Tall, narrow windows echo the straight vertical lines of cedar and fir forests across the Pacific Northwest. The sustainable Kebony siding recalls the traditional houses of western Washington's native communities and will similarly silver as it ages.

Visual transparency enhances the Burke's connections to the surrounding community, as well. From the museum's interior, large windows provide views out to the University District landscape, allowing visitors to orient themselves as they progress through collections. Dual entrances open to both the campus and city, explicitly welcoming both populations.

See NEW MODEL — page 9



Congratulations to the Burke Museum on the Grand Opening

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# Burke's landscape will bloom into a new quad at the UW

■ Crews are installing thousands of plants to frame the new space.

By GGN and Oxbow Farm & Conservation Center staff

A unique myriad of colorful, fragrant and flavorful plants are richly intertwined into the indigenous culture, food, art, health and festive traditions in Seattle and our region, as they have been for thousands of years. Oddly, this beauty and wealth of botanical knowledge and artistry is seldom made available to us in the mass-produced landscapes and gardens that are now common in the Pacific Northwest.

"The new Burke presents the rare opportunity for people to see and experience a sampling of these garden-worthy, useful plants and of the millennia of ethnobotanical connections between people and these plants," says Shannon Nichol, founding principal of GGN and landscape architect of the new Burke Museum.

## COLLABORATION TO GROW PLANTS

"Eighty-thousand native plants are in the midst of being installed at the new Burke. Seventy-thousand of these were specially grown by Oxbow Farm & Conservation Center for this project," says Bridget McNassar, native plant program manager at Oxbow.

Most of these plants were propagated by seed, which was collected locally by hand. Local seed propagation — as opposed to tissue propagation, which is usually faster but creates genetically identical clones — imbues the new Burke's plants with rich genetic diversity and adaptive resiliency, ensuring optimal performance over the long term on this urban, Central Puget Sound lowland site. For example, much of the camas seed was collected on a small island in the San Juans and sown at Oxbow in 2015.

"These seed-started bulbs have been slowly increasing in size over the past four growing sea-

sons and are ready now to be planted at the Burke, where they will showcase not only the rare and beautiful ecosystem from which they hail, but also their thousands of years of cultural importance," says McNassar.

## SLOPED DONUT TO FRAMED QUAD

When Olson Kundig proposed relocating the Burke Museum from the center of its site on the University of Washington campus to the very edge of 15th Avenue Northeast, the opportunity was suddenly created to introduce a new quad within the existing campus.

The Burke's building had long occupied the center of a large site at the northwest corner of campus, skirted by a donut of parking and drive lanes. By relocating the new Burke Museum to the edge of this same site, the architects opened up the site's significant central space. The new Burke Museum both frames and activates that central space, which is called the Burke Yard.

## FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE

GGN's design of the site continues this long-term view toward formatting the bone structure of a future quad around the new Burke. Clear borders around the square Burke Yard will physically guide the location of any additional buildings, aligning them around the protected open space with strategically placed retaining walls.

Today, the Burke Yard is enclosed in the tradition of any quad, but instead of buildings, the enclosure is provided by a tall frame of restored, second-growth forest, newly planted Douglas fir trees and the new museum building itself.

## A FLEXIBLE FLOOR

The Burke Yard is nearly level. This simple, square "floor"

is carved from the previously sloped site as if the floor of the museum was pulled out like a drawer. This allows universal access, flexible programming of the Burke Yard (from parking to events) and adaptability over time toward more frequent or complete pedestrian use of this valuable open space.

## THE CAMAS STEPS

While the north edge of the Burke Yard is carved into the slope, the south edge, which brings people to the museum's east entry and cafe, perches above the adjacent 43rd Street/Stevens Way walkway into campus.

"This long-quiet walkway will soon be rediscovered as the arrival point for thousands of people coming from the new light rail station a couple of blocks to the west," says Nichol.

The lifted south edge of the Burke Yard is designed as a social overlook, in the form of a series of seat steps facing toward the campus walkway activity. The seat steps also offer each passerby a strong visual cue of entry and welcome — an informal take on the grand steps that announce the entries of traditional museums.

## COMING NEXT SPRING

"Perhaps most importantly, these seating steps are a place where people can enjoy the living colors, fragrances and relationships of our region's beautiful indigenous plants," says Nichol.

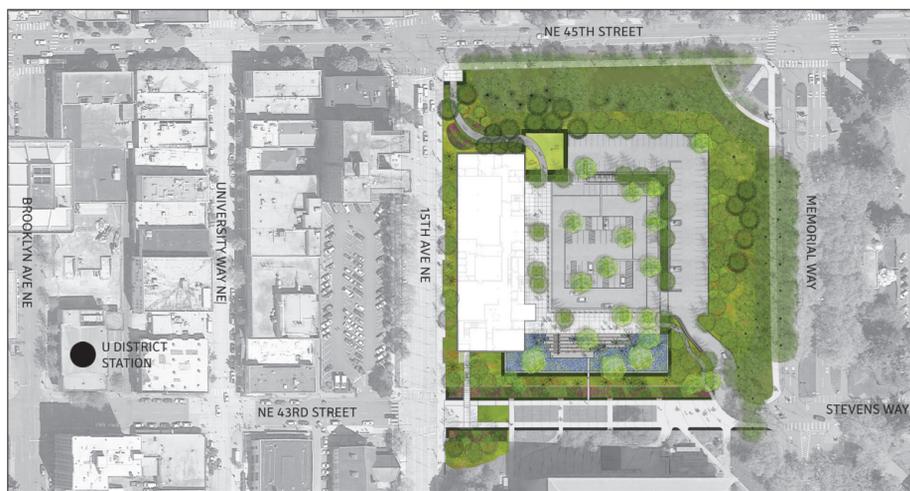
Wrapping around and extending from the seat steps is the Camas Meadow, planted with 15,000 camas plants, which will provide a stunning annual display with early spring bloom of blue-violet. Camas is a central feature in indigenous traditions of food, landscape cultivation and the celebration of the seasons. Camas flowers provide vital early-season pollen and nectar for pollinators, which will animate the meadow.

McNassar adds, "Three species



The south edge of the Burke Yard creates a welcoming gathering place in front of the museum's east entry in this early rendering by Olson Kundig. A series of seat steps, facing toward the campus, overlooks the Camas Meadow.

Image from GGN



Key features of the site plan are the building's activation of 15th Avenue, the preservation of mature trees along 45th Street and Memorial Way, and a new gateway into campus along Stevens Way.

Image by GGN

See LANDSCAPE — page 9



Rendering credit: Olson Kundig Architects

Skanska is proud to have partnered with the Burke Museum to create an extraordinary experience that will benefit our community for generations to come.

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# Burke's dream of an 'inside-out' museum comes together

■ Continuous vertical public circulation inside ties public spaces together in an intuitive and visible way.

By JACK PASCAROSA  
Evidence Design

On Oct. 12 the Burke Museum will reopen in its new building, a state-of-the-art museum and research center on the University of Washington campus. Architecturally and interpretively, the new 113,000-square-foot facility blurs the traditional lines between labs, collections and public gallery spaces towards a destination that invites the public to share the knowledge and activities of the Burke and celebrates the nature and culture of the Pacific Northwest and beyond.



Pascaros

Observing visitors' responses to behind-the-scenes tours sparked Executive Director Dr. Julie K. Stein and her team on a 10-year journey to a build a new facility that reveals Burke research and collections, and connects visitors to the staff and volunteers who use them to learn, generate knowledge, find inspiration, experience joy and heal.

An unwavering commitment to "turning the museum inside-out" led the Burke Museum to build a radically transparent and accessible new facility featuring 12 visible labs and workrooms, six galleries and two classrooms, as well as play spaces for young learners and alcoves for flexible programming. These interwoven spaces and transparencies dispense with the traditional lines of front and back-of-house to establish the Burke as a new kind of museum.

To realize its ambitious dream to build an inside-out institution, the Burke Museum tapped consultants Walt Crimm Associates for facility planning, Renate Group who made great strides in defining the Burke's re-imagined

identity, and Olson Kundig for architectural design. In 2014, the Burke engaged Evidence Design to develop the programming of public spaces in the building and to execute interpretive planning and exhibition design of the visitor experiences.

This diverse team took on the challenges of transcending museum norms to stay true to the vision at every step of the process including space planning, architecture, exhibit design and interpretive design, as well as prototyping to test the concept along the way.

Each consultant collaborated with the Burke team and built upon the work of others. In the early phases, Olson Kundig, Walt Crimm and Renate worked closely with Burke staff and leadership to develop the overall build forms, facilities space planning and the initial inside-out interpretive direction.

When Evidence Design joined the team during schematic design, the interior organization of functions and public spaces were yet to be fully programmed. Our first task was to explore the degree to which this inside-out philosophy would shape the interrelationships among the workings of the Burke and public spaces. Through workshops with the Burke's curatorial, educational, marketing and development departments, we presented a spectrum of integration models that represented degrees of intersection between the back-of-house activities and public interpretive and experiential spaces.

After lengthy dialogue, the Burke committed to a high level of integration between labs and collections, exhibit galleries and experiential programming spaces. Another key aspect of this spatial programming exercise included our recommendation of continuous vertical public circulation in order to tie the public spaces together in an intuitive and visible way. This approach



A crew member makes final adjustments in the Fossils Uncovered Gallery.

Photo by Evidence Design

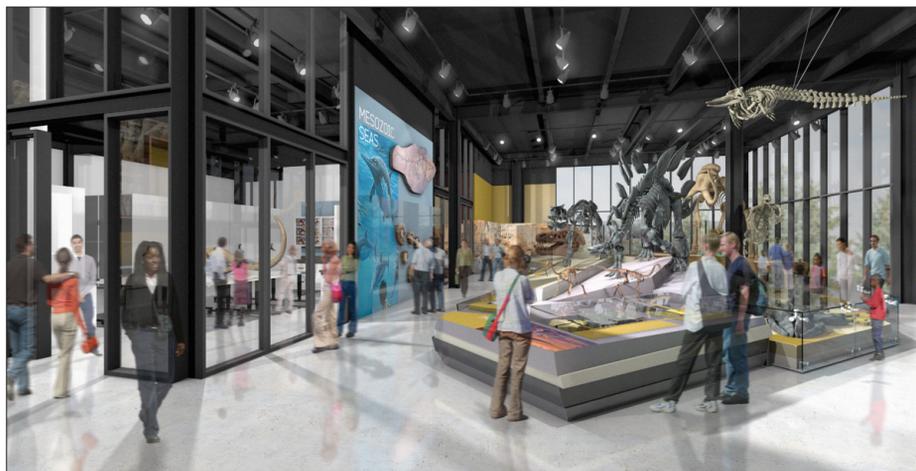
would allow guests to have a sense of the entirety of the Burke and to navigate their options the moment they enter the building.

Evidence Design then shared the resulting interior programming model with Olson Kundig, who iterated the interior architectural design, including a slot canyon-like central stair and circulation space that was crossed by bridges and open to galleries, programming spaces with visible and flexibly accessible labs, workrooms and collections spaces distributed along the main visitor paths. As such, the architectural implementation of the interpretive planning led to public exhibit galleries taking on characteristics of labs and collections, while traditional research spaces inherited exhibit-like qualities.

For the public exhibit galleries, Evidence Design worked with Burke to develop diverse encounters that connect scientific discoveries and cultural connections to the adjacent collections and research that make



Large walls of glass give passersby a peek into the Fossils Uncovered Gallery. Photo by Evidence Design



Sliding glass doors in the Fossils Uncovered Gallery open for guest interaction with Burke staff in the adjacent paleontology collections workroom. Rendering from Evidence Design



A cladogram exhibit is central to the Biodiversity Gallery. Rendering from Evidence Design

See BURKE'S DREAM — page 9

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## New model

*Continued from page 2*

Likewise, views into the museum from the street expose the ongoing work of the museum to passersby. This porous visual exchange helps to reestablish the Burke — the state’s oldest public museum — as a public asset. It’s also an effective way to draw guests through the door, already anticipating increased pedestrian traffic when the U District light rail station opens in 2021.

“I think of the Burke as a natural history library where you can peek through the window and see what’s on the shelves,” Kundig says. “You see something cool, so you come inside and have access to the items that interest you. From there you make connections to other areas of study also housed within the museum. The Burke empowers you to follow the threads of your own curiosity.”

*Cate O’ Toole is a marketing coordinator at Olson Kundig.*

## Burke’s dream

*Continued from page 4*

them possible. For example, in the Biodiversity Gallery, visitors will encounter a three-dimensional “tree of life” populated by an extraordinary array of specimens that emerge from their evolutionary positions embedded in the table. The exhibit demonstrates the majestic logic of life itself — the result of the diligent work of scientists and the tremendous importance of collections and research that visitors to the Burke will see in action for themselves.

Meanwhile, the Burke exhibit team developed a prototyping strategy to test the relationships between the visiting public and the ongoing and now visible work taking place at the museum. The totality of these combined programming and design efforts resulted in the following set of integrated spaces and experiences:

**LABS:** Through large windows visitors witness museum activities such as specimen preparation, photography of cultural objects and fossil preparation. Staff will update flexible signage that chronicles the work of the day. Large sliding glass doors can be opened to allow the public to interact with experts and collections.

**COLLECTIONS SPACES:** Walls of glass provide views into the Burke’s rich holdings of specimens and artifacts from local and global cultures. The collections include changeable interpretation to engage visitors in the activities they see happening within.

**EXHIBIT GALLERIES:** Exhibit galleries are self-directed experiences with multiple forms of visitor engagement mediums including collections, graphics, mechanical interactives, and strategic use of digital technology. Exhibit galleries are open to adjacent corresponding labs and collection workrooms.

**LEARNING ALCOVES:** Flexible educational programming spaces are tucked in between thematically adjacent labs, collections and exhibit galleries on each floor. They can accommodate up to 25 students and engage family groups when classes are not in session.

**CIRCULATION SPACES, MICRONICHES:** Wide corridors, openings between floors, stairwells and microniches or small artifact cases scattered like a string of pearls throughout the building provide opportunities for unexpected encounters.

The new Burke Museum embodies a holistic, intentional design that realizes the vision of an “inside-out” museum. This achievement is the product of the strong collaboration between interpretive and architectural designers, informed by a clear vision provided by the Burke. The result is a new institution that enables the new Burke to protect and share collections that constitute the natural and cultural heritage of the people of Washington state, facilitate meaningful visitor engagement with Burke Museum research and collections, and create a valued public amenity that connects the community to the mission and campus of the University of Washington.

*Jack Pascarosa, AIA, is a partner at Evidence Design, a museum planning and exhibition design firm based in Brooklyn, New York City.*

## Landscape

*Continued from page 3*

of native grasses, while forming soft drifts of color, also serve as host plants that feed the larvae of insects, which in turn form the basis of the food chain in our region. Many other species of plants are included in the Camas Meadow for year-round interest, gardening inspiration and a full-color experience of our region’s once-prevalent, lowland-prairie landscape.”