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Can you picture this?

\$85 million expansion for Crocker Art Museum

By Mary Lynne Vellinga - Bee Staff Writer

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New York architect Charles Gwathmey has designed the modern addition to the Crocker, with skylights on the roof. Sacramento Bee/Autumn Cruz

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Downtown Sacramento has seen some spectacular dreams go poof in the past year -- a new basketball arena, twin 53-story condominium towers -- but the ambitious expansion of the Crocker Art Museum is poised to become reality.

The city-owned Crocker breaks ground today on an \$85 million expansion that will more than triple its size.

A courtyard will separate the two Victorian mansions that currently house the museum from a strikingly modern addition clad in white aluminum and gray zinc panels.

Museum staff members were buzzing with anticipation Wednesday as they ferried famed New York architect Charles Gwathmey around town to discuss his design.

First, the city will move Second Street to make way for the new building. Then, the concrete, 1960s-era Herold Wing will be torn down. Construction on the 125,000-square-foot addition is slated to begin in the fall.

"It's a really big deal for the city of Sacramento to build any museum, but to build a museum as significant as the Crocker is really outstanding," Mayor Heather Fargo said Wednesday. "The community has really stepped up."

Gwathmey, of Gwathmey Siegel & Associates, came to attend the festivities. Deeply tanned and dressed in a polo shirt, he threw a sport coat on for media appearances. Gwathmey has designed houses and apartments for celebrity clients such as Faye Dunaway, Steven Spielberg and David Geffen.

He also has done many library and museum projects around the country. He designed the addition to Frank Lloyd Wright's iconic Guggenheim Museum in New York. Recently, like other big-name architects, he's turned to designing high-rise condominium towers.

Gwathmey's modern addition to the Crocker, which features saw-toothed skylights on the roof, was blessed by the city's Design Review Board with minor changes.

Lial Jones, the museum director, said the idea of mixing old and new has generated little controversy. Times change, she said.

"Judge Crocker, when he built this building, built a piece of high-concept contemporary architecture," she said. "That's what we're doing now, and I think people understand that."

Gwathmey said he enjoys creating modern additions to historic structures. "It's great to engage in the history of architecture by commenting and extending its legacy," he said.

When working alongside the Italianate mansions built by Judge Edwin B. Crocker, Gwathmey said he sought to include elements that visually extended those in the originals.

The historic porches and balconies, for instance, are echoed in a curving porch on the two-story reception area of the new building. The new building will be the same height as the old ones.

Gwathmey said he chose white aluminum because it will work well with the light in Sacramento and because it echoes the Capitol a few blocks away.

Compared with other museum clients he has worked with, Gwathmey said, the Crocker fundraising effort is on a more solid fiscal footing as construction begins.

Between signed pledges and contributions from local and state governments, the Crocker has raised \$82 million of the \$100 million it is seeking to both fund the addition and boost its meager endowment.

Other museums typically break ground when they've raised only about half the money needed, said Jones, the Crocker's director.

The effort received a big boost in June when Arden Fair mall owners Mort and Marcy Friedman doubled their \$5 million pledge, and the Joyce and Jim Teel Foundation -- funded by the Raley's grocery chain fortune -- raised its contribution from \$8 million to \$13 million.

"It was clearly the right thing to do," Marcy Friedman said in a phone interview Wednesday. "Sacramento needs this facility in order to stand up proud among all other cities."

Friedman, who has spent seven years co-chairing the fund drive, said she hopes it will establish a precedent under which the city's wealthy will start giving more to local causes.

"This city has long had a not-so-sterling reputation in terms of raising philanthropic dollars for anything," she said. "There's plenty of money in Sacramento; don't let anyone tell you there isn't. It's a matter of creating a culture and

climate in which people feel proud to give up some of the money that came from their years of working in this city."

Once construction begins, Jones expects the donor base to expand dramatically as more people give smaller gifts. To date, 166 individuals and foundations have signed pledges to donate \$63.5 million. The city of Sacramento has committed \$12 million.

More money could come from the city's sale of Lot X, a parking lot near the museum. The city is currently seeking a buyer.

The museum addition will quadruple the space available at the Crocker for traveling exhibitions and will triple the display area for the permanent collection.

At the moment, the Crocker can show only 4 percent of its collection at any one time. And that collection keeps growing, Jones said.

In recent years, the museum has become a magnet for ceramics collectors looking to make significant donations. Recent additions include a collection of Asian ceramics dating from the 16th to the 18th century, and a collection of 18th- and 19th-century Meissen porcelain tableware from Germany.


"I predict by the time of the opening, we'll have the fourth-largest collection of ceramics in the United States," Jones said.

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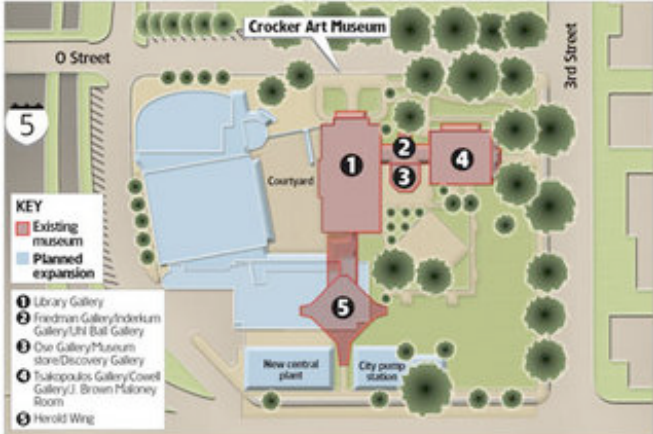
City's marquee museum prepares for expansion

The Crocker Art Museum is planning to build a new wing west of the existing museum. The \$85 million addition will triple the museum's size. The decidedly modern structure was designed by renowned architect Charles Gwathmey.



History

- Seth Bulson was commissioned to design an art gallery next to the Crocker Mansion. It was completed in 1872.
- Judge Edwin B. Crocker and Margaret Crocker opened a public art museum in the late 1800s.
- The art gallery's design is Victorian Italianate.
- The Herold Wing was added in 1969.
- The former Crocker Mansion's historic facade was restored and a modern gallery interior was added in 1989.




KEY

- Existing museum
- Planned expansion

1 Library Gallery
 2 Fradette Gallery/Ingram Gallery/3rd Ball Gallery
 3 On Gallery/Museum store/Discovery Gallery
 4 Tsakopoulos Gallery/Cowell Gallery/J. Brown Maloney Room
 5 Herold Wing

Other features: New central plant, City pump station, Courtyard, 0 Street, 3rd Street.



Courtesy of Crocker Art Museum

The schematic illustration shows the new Crocker wing that will sit across the courtyard from the current building.

Source: crockerartmuseum.org Sacramento (Saci) Olivia Nguyen

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