



## ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

2005 – 2009 Boston, USA

Fenway Court, the site of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, was opened in 1903 in the cultural district of Boston to house the astonishing collection amassed by Isabella Stewart (1840-1924) and John Lowell Gardner (1837-1898), one of the city's most prominent businessmen. To soothe her grief at the death of their eldest son in 1865, Isabella began to travel in Europe where, drawing on the advice of great art connoisseurs, such as Bernard Berenson, and Gardner's almost unlimited financial capital, she gradually acquired works by Titian, Giorgione, Piero della Francesca, Paolo Uccello, Botticelli, Vermeer, Rembrandt, Degas, Manet and many others.

Designed by William T. Sears working in close collaboration with Isabella, on the model of a Venetian palace, with exhibition spaces arranged around a large courtyard filled with vegetation, Fenway Court eventually proved unable to cope with the more than 200,000 visitors who throng the museum annually.

The new wing designed by the Renzo Piano Building Workshop opened in 2012 adds no less 6500 square meters of floor space, fulfilling the dual function of providing new museum spaces and easing the flow of visitors from the fragile earlier building.

The expansion is close to Fenway Court, linked by a glass corridor running through the garden. It consists of two buildings connected and served by a generous glazed atrium open onto Evans Way Park, forming the new museum entrance. The main building has a square plan and is four stories high, divided into two asymmetric parts by the airy central staircase, while a second cuboid two-story volume is characterized by a sloping glass roof that reaches down to ground level. The main building houses a concert hall, exhibition gallery, large lounge, café, gift shop and other facilities. The second building contains the greenhouses, offices for staff and restoration workshops on the ground floor, and residences for artists on the floor above.

The heart of the museum's new wing is Calderwood Hall: a concert hall and conference facility with a square plan featuring three tiers of galleries arranged around a central space, on the model of the Shakespeare's Globe theater. An intimate space, which holds a maximum of 300 guests and completely abolishes the separation between stage and audience: at the center there is the orchestra and all around, along the walls, rise the loggias marked by a single row of seats on each level. To deal with the technical aspects of the resonance of sound we drew on the experience of the engineer Yasuhisa Toyota of Nagata Acoustics.



The expansion of the museum also houses the Special Exhibition Gallery: a space covering 300 square meters used to exhibit the contemporary art collections and other works from the permanent collection. A mobile ceiling makes it possible to vary the height of the gallery,

while a great window 11 meters high catches the light from the north and frames Fenway Court. The subtle visual relations between the historic building and the new museum wing also characterizes the triple-ramp staircase that separates and simultaneously connects the music room with the exhibition galleries. Suspended from slender steel cables to the roof of the building, this staircase is has transparent glass sidewalls open to the historic building and the park.

The search for lightness is also evident in the sensitive modular cladding between the glass screens and pre-oxidized copper panels skillfully pleated to refract the light while dematerializing the clear profiles of the volumes. The project has obtained LEED Gold certification. To reduce the environmental impacts caused by transport, local materials were used. The complex uses built-in systems for harvesting rainwater and geothermal power, as well as excellent modulation of natural light that becomes both a technical and artistic feature.