

## Dallas Morning News, The (TX)

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### Museum rises in style

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Long before its completion, the exterior of the new Perot Museum of Nature & Science has been creating buzz. Officials there are hoping the interior will incite even more. That interior - still mostly a bare shell - was opened to media representatives Thursday in the first public look inside what backers hope will become a city icon. The finished museum, designers and officials took turns saying, will be engaging, educational, environmentally conscious and connected to the city that surrounds it. Visitors will walk through a planted forest to reach the lobby, and then ride a glass-walled escalator with a spectacular view of downtown. They can linger on a terrace overlooking a landscape of native shrubbery. Each significant rain will produce a waterfall that will replenish the museum's water-conserving cisterns. Above all, the institution will serve to raise the profile of science and technology in North Texas, said Nicole Small, the museum's CEO. "We know that this country and especially Texas lag behind the world in technology and science," Small said. "This museum attempts to address that." The 180,000-square-foot structure in Victory Park is scheduled to open early next year. The \$185 million institution was built entirely with private funds. As the structure has arisen on the north side of Woodall Rodgers Freeway over the past year, its unusual design has drawn love-it or hate-it reactions. Supporters say they believe the cutting-edge concrete cube will draw national attention. Less-kind critics have compared it to a crumpled grocery bag. Thom Mayne, the museum's Pritzker award-winning architect, said the striated outer surface was designed to resemble the shale banks of a North Texas creek, combining the themes of nature, geology and - because such layers can be embedded with fossils - paleontology. "I've often thought it doesn't matter whether people like it or hate it, it's more important to understand its purpose. Would you say you hated how a lunar landing module looked?" he said. Though museums are often designed as aloof structures on a campus-like setting, Mayne said he wanted a building with strong connections to its urban setting. Thus, as visitors turn corners they will come upon striking views of Fountain Place or Reunion Tower, or - opposite the dinosaur exhibit - the jumbo video screen in Victory Plaza. At night, lighted dinosaur skeletons inside the museum should be visible from Field Street. The five floors of exhibit space will feature tall ceilings and soaring atriums, lit - wherever possible - by natural light. "Everywhere we could put glass, we put glass," Small said. The effect will be to cut down on the amount of artificial lighting needed - part of an effort to create an environmentally green building. Two 25,000-gallon cisterns will provide water - other than drinking water - for the building. Coffee in the museum cafe will be heated by solar power. Officials have yet to set an opening date for the museum, nor will they publicly guess at how many visitors it will draw. "It think it's safe to say we expect to draw millions over the first few years," Small said. Officials also have been offering the facility for private events, such as weddings. "We only allowed people last week to start booking, and we're already packed," she said. "I'm guessing we have 100 so far."

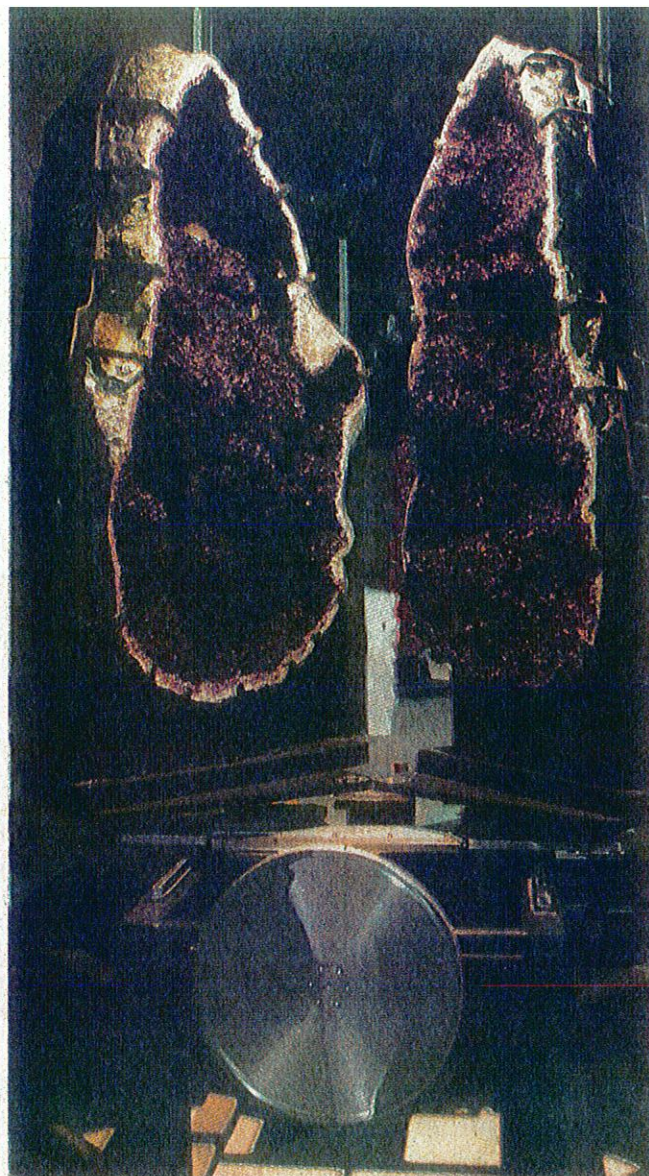




Photos by Lara Solt/Staff Photographer

**Visitors will walk** through a planted forest to reach the lobby, and then ride a glass-walled escalator with a spectacular view of downtown. The museum's award-winning architect wanted a building with strong ties to its urban setting.





A 1½ ton geode on display at the museum can be opened and closed with the turn of a wheel.

### A glimpse of the museum

Floor-by-floor breakdown of the Perot Museum of Nature & Science, which is under construction in downtown Dallas:

#### Fifth floor:

Museum staff offices

#### Third floor:

Rees-Jones Foundation

Dynamic Earth Hall

Tom Hunt Energy Hall

Gems & Minerals Hall

#### First floor:

Lobby

Cafe & museum store

Theater

#### Basement:

Jan & Trevor Rees-

Jones Exhibition Hall

Moody Family Children's

Museum

Sports Hall, auditorium &

classrooms

#### Fourth floor:

Expanding Universe Hall

T. Boone Pickens Life: Then & Now Hall

Rose Hall of Birds

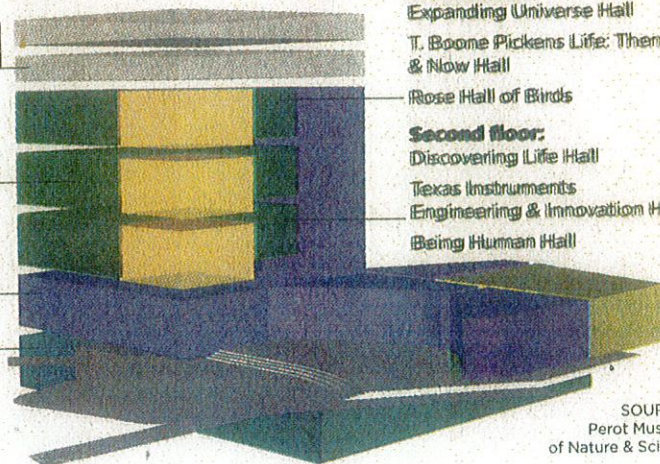
#### Second floor:

Discovering Life Hall

Texas Instruments

Engineering & Innovation Hall

Being Human Hall



SOURCE:  
Perot Museum  
of Nature & Science  
Staff graphic