

# Renovating the Baltimore Museum of Art

By C.L. Taylor

**A**s the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) approaches its centennial celebration in 2014, the institution has embarked upon an ambitious three-year capital renovation program. Planned improvements will transform galleries, improve the visitor experience, and upgrade buildings systems that are critical to operations and the safekeeping of collections.

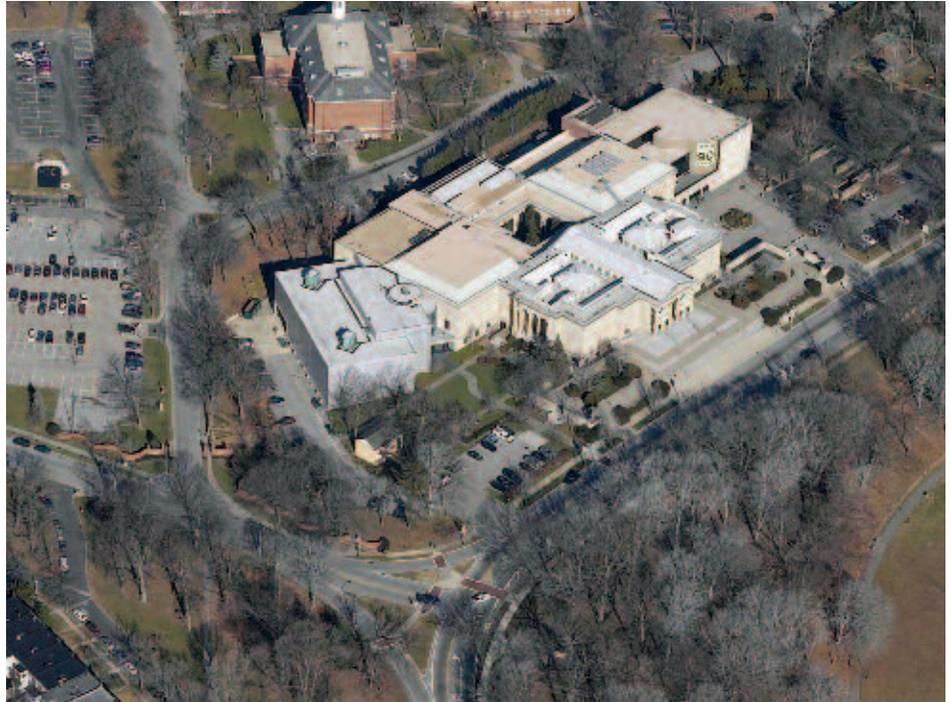
“This unprecedented physical transformation is vital to the BMA’s future,” says Director Doreen Bolger. “We want to ensure that the Museum is relevant to future generations of museum-goers and an even greater cultural magnet for the region.”

## Not Glamorous, But Important

“In the museum world, when you’re prioritizing budgets and expenditures, you want to focus on enhancing the visitor experience and the collections,” says Ken Rock, PE, LEED AP, a senior vice-president with the mechanical/electrical engineering firm of Mueller Associates. “The BMA has done an excellent job, however, of keeping its facilities up to date and running efficiently as well. Ultimately, that helps to ensure the protection of the collections, while also minimizing expenditures for energy and maintenance over the long term.”

Mueller Associates is part of an experienced team, along with the architectural firm of Ziger/Snead, that is responsible for the design of the latest renovations to the BMA. Careful phasing of design and construction is ensuring that the museum can remain open to visitors throughout the process.

“Mueller is one of the consultants on the very talented design team for our \$24 million Phase I and Phase II renovation projects,” says Alan Dirican, CFM, MBA, Deputy Director for oper-



*Aerial View of the Baltimore Museum of Art.*

ations and capital planning for the BMA. “They have the not-so-glamorous but enormously important responsibility for engineering the infrastructure improvements, including the building automation system. The current BAS is about 17 years old and is no longer supported by the manufacturer.

“It has been an easy decision for the Museum to request Mueller as one of the design team members,” adds Dirican. “We have had a long and very satisfactory working relationship with them through numerous renovation and expansion projects, chiller upgrades, and other infrastructure improvements over the years. They not only understand the unique requirements of the museum environment, but are also very familiar with our mechanical and electrical systems.”

According to Bob Marino, PE, LEED AP, Mueller Associates has been working with the BMA since the 1970s,

engineering more than 40 improvement and new construction projects. The firm served as the mechanical/electrical engineer for the East Wing addition in the early 1980s; the West Wing addition in 1994; the renovation of the Cone Wing; installation of a new chiller; and roof replacements for the Cone Wing, the East Wing, and the Jacobs Building.

“Our knowledge of the intricacies of the HVAC, plumbing, and electrical infrastructure and distribution systems at the BMA enables us to inform the decision-making process for reprogramming spaces, proposing renovations, and determining the cost impact of construction,” says Marino. “With the historical Pope building and the various additions, there is a complicated network of ductwork and pipes woven throughout the Museum. It’s also important to assess the systems on an ongoing basis to ensure continued function and reliability.”

## A Unique Facility

The current round of renovations will transform the Contemporary Art Wing with state-of-the-art lighting, a new black-box gallery, and redesigned displays. In the American Wing, nine galleries will be renovated, with highlights including a new showcase for the works of Louis Tiffany, and a gallery dedicated to Maryland artists. The African Art galleries will be reorganized thematically, and will feature new displays of African masks, textiles, and other objects.

Although it will be invisible to visitors, the new BAS is a highlight of the capital improvements. "This is a complete replacement, which will allow for more reliability and control," says

Mueller's Ken Rock. "The Museum will be able to operate the building much more efficiently."

Rock also points to the building's complexity as a challenge in the engineering process. "The BMA is a unique facility," he says. "Unlike a new building designed from the ground up, this museum has a lot of components added over many years. There are a lot of construction types and styles, and it's a challenge to get everything to fit and work together, recognizing that there are very strict requirements for power, temperature, and humidity. The infrastructure needs to be reliable, quiet, and invisible—and it must contribute to creating a cohesive, modern building for visitors to enjoy."

Rock adds that it helps to have extensive knowledge of the BMA building, dating back over four decades. "Our engineers have been in every nook and cranny of that building," he says. "Over the years, our older engineers have trained our younger engineers and shared that knowledge. It's an honor for us to work for such a significant cultural institution. The Baltimore Museum of Art draws people from all over the world. We have always enjoyed working with their staff, and look forward to completing this important phase of improvements." 🏛️

*C.L. Taylor writes about architecture and engineering for Capstone Communications.*

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