

Tips for specifying museums

Balancing code requirements with high security demands, imaginative aesthetic visions and functionality is truly an art. And Lori Greene, DAHC/CDC, CCPR, FDAI, FDHI, is a master of this craft. Known for her code expertise, Lori has specified several high-profile museums during her career. These types of projects are known to be labor intensive and can take years to move through the design and construction phases. But in the end, there is a prestige that comes with being part of an exquisite project.

Greene's advice? Compromise, communicate and coordinate. "The hardest part can be compromising between the architects' aesthetic vision, the functional needs of an assembly occupancy with high traffic and the level of security — all while complying with the applicable code requirements. These projects can go on for years, so it's important to keep up with changes throughout the project. Stay in the know by communicating with all of the stakeholders, and coordinate along the way."



Security

Coordinating security in a museum is different than other facilities. Security has to be high to protect the valuable masterpieces on display. On the other hand, museums are considered assembly occupancies by the model codes, so egress must be designed for many people to exit quickly. Plus, since museums are frequented by people of all ages and physical abilities, accessibility needs to be a top priority. The desire would be to deter or prevent egress to avoid theft, but the museum must comply with the code requirements. Striking the balance between security, safety and accessibility is complex. Coordinate with the security consultant along the way.



Function

Functionality and durability is essential to public spaces like these. Specify products that will hold up and function in high-use environments. Keep in mind details like fire protection. The design might call for a large expanse of glazing that complements the elegant design of a modern art museum. While beautiful, that wall may also have to act as a fire barrier or smoke partition to keep the building occupants and art safe in the event of an emergency. How the art moves through a museum to get to its display location also needs to be considered. When moving large sculptures into an exhibition area, the corridors, door openings and elevator need to be wide enough for the art to pass without interruption.



Aesthetics

Museums are often just as beautiful as the artwork they house. This can become an obstacle. In many cases, architects have aesthetic preferences in mind. So it's up to you, as the specification consultant, to accommodate their vision in a way that agrees with security needs, code requirements and functionality of the space — as well as the facility's standards and product preferences.



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