

PROJECTS AT THE ADVENTURE AQUARIUM:

**CAMDEN CHILDREN'S GARDEN, PENGUIN EXHIBIT, AND THE ADVENTURE AQUARIUM ENTRANCE**

*Architects: Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.*

*Location: Camden, NJ*

*Client: Cooper's Ferry Development Association (Children's Garden); Adventure Aquarium (Penguin Exhibit and Aquarium Entrance)*

*Completion: 1999 (Children's Garden); 1998 (Penguin Exhibit); 2000 (Aquarium Entrance)*

*Construction Cost: \$7,500,000 (Children's Garden); \$1,000,000 (Penguin Exhibit); \$650,000 (Aquarium Entrance)*

*Area: 4 acre site*



*Camden Children's Garden.* Children's gardens are a relatively new exhibit type whose primary goal is to let relatively young children interact directly with plant materials. The Camden Children's Garden at The Adventure Aquarium in Camden, New Jersey (formerly the NJ State Aquarium), is primarily an outdoor facility along the waterfront with a series of themed gardens designed to provide a variety of experiences and to appeal to a wide range of age groups. The over-all design intent is to allow children to learn while they are having fun. In addition to the garden, VSBA's work included design of support facilities (7000 sf) that included a Gatehouse (ticket sales and public restrooms), canopy, Clubhouse (retail store and offices) and Greenhouse.

While the garden by its very nature has many small scale, low-to-the-ground exhibits, we included elements in the garden's design that make a big-scale impact along the urban waterfront by means of large-scale, high-reader graphics. The individual exhibits can change monthly and seasonally, and the garden functions by day and night, as a public garden for all ages.





*New entrance*





*Penguin Exhibit.* The outdoor Penguin Exhibit was designed to house 15 South African penguins. We made maximum use of a split-level site condition that allowed us to achieve underwater viewing, as well as above water level viewing along the approach path to the entrance to the Aquarium.

Unlike the typical “naturalistic” exhibit design, where simulated natural environments are created by means of fiberglass, we made a conscious aesthetic decision to create a large-scale, two-dimensional painted backdrop for the penguins, their beach and their pool. This abstract sky/rock/water landscape creates the illusion of a natural context, which we believe is more powerful and in the end far more convincing than the ersatz fiberglass version, and quite a rapid departure from accepted contextual design.



*Penguin Exhibit and Children's Garden*





*The Adventure Aquarium Entrance:* The entrance addition for the Adventure Aquarium provides a new space for relocated retail shops. (This relocation allowed the conversion of an interior space from retail into a new exhibit). The VSBA design for the retail shell fashions a new public face in front of the massive concrete structure of the Aquarium. VSBA continued themes from the Children's Garden and Penguin Exhibit by layering varied-scale elements in the building's façade (canopy, signage, billboard and building). These elements visually connect the aquarium building to both the garden and to the street entrance. These elements also add further visual layering within the experiences of arrival and circulation within the facility.



*Views of the new Aquarium entrance and Children's Garden*