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# The New Chicago Architecture Center Debuts in a Riverside Mies van der Rohe Building

It's an appropriate—and exciting—new home

TEXT BY [LAURA ITZKOWITZ](#) · Posted August 28, 2018



The Chicago Architecture Center's new home at 111 East Wacker is a modernist Mies van der Rohe building set amidst a bevy of historic structures.



Photo: Angie McMonigal

Looking out from the 40-foot floor-to-ceiling glass windows of the new Chicago Architecture Center on the corner of East Wacker Drive and Michigan Avenue, the Chicago River, Wrigley Building, and DuSable Bridge are spread out before you in a panorama of the Windy City's most important buildings and landmarks. Watching the pedestrians pass by, it's no wonder you feel like you're in the beating heart of Chicago—this was the site of Fort Dearborn, where the city was founded, and it still pulses with life. Not only are you standing on hallowed ground, you're gazing out from a midcentury treasure by the Office of Mies van der Rohe, who lived and worked in Chicago until his death.



The new waterfront location will serve as the starting point for the Center's popular tours.

Photo: Angie McMonigal

Following an extensive renovation by acclaimed local firm Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill, Van Der Rohe's building will get a new lease on life when the Center officially opens on August 31. Formerly located on Michigan Avenue across from Millennium Park, the CAC doubled its size, expanding from 10,000 to 20,000 square feet. It's an appropriate transition for the Center, which, since its inception as the Chicago Architecture Foundation in 1966, has become one of the city's most important cultural organizations.



The Center's new box office, designed by Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill.

Photo: Courtesy of the Chicago Architecture Center

"I think we're most excited about having a real home and a real presence," the Center's president and CEO, Lynn Osmond, tells AD PRO. "We had a home that we kept expanding; now we have a center that's been purpose-designed."

Entering off the street, visitors will find a bright, airy reception area where they can check in for the CAC's popular walking tours and other events. A grand staircase leads up to the second floor, where a new skyscraper gallery will display scale models of the world's tallest buildings, including Saudi Arabia's forthcoming Jeddah Tower by Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill. A flexible auditorium space will host talks by local and visiting architects, starting with Todd Williams and Billie Tsein discussing their plans for the Obama Presidential Center. Tucked away on the first floor, the Chicago Gallery will display the Chicago Model Experience, which is being expanded from 1,300 to 3,000 buildings. In the previous space, the models were out in the open, but here images and a film will be projected onto the walls, illuminating the architectural history of the skyscraper's birthplace. There will also be a gallery for rotating exhibits, a design studio, and a store. Admission to the exhibits will be included in the price of a walking tour.



Visitors in the Center's Skyscraper Gallery.

Photo: Courtesy of the Chicago Architecture Center

“What is unique about the Chicago Architecture Center is we have always had a very large public audience and that’s been our primary focus, but this center will allow us to do more for emerging architects,” Osmond says. In addition to hosting students, the programming being developed will give young architects a chance to hear from leaders in the field, like Annabelle Selldorf and Deborah Berke. The docent-led walking tours have been rerouted to start at the new center. And this year, Open House Chicago is expanding to 262 sites, including the new CAC.

“I’m as excited about the things we planned for as I am about the things we have no idea are going to happen,” Gordon Gill says. “I think there are a lot of opportunities for interaction with the public that we don’t fully grasp yet and I’m dying to see how the general public will gravitate to the space.”