

The “Double Platinum” Goes to: The California Academy of Sciences!

By Sean Martinfield
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Awarded for its sustainable operations and maintenance, the California Academy of Sciences is now the world’s largest “Double Platinum” building

The California Academy of Sciences unveiled the world’s greenest museum — an eco-friendly new home featuring a hilly living roof, recycled denim insulation, and many other green innovations. Three years and more than five million visitors later, the museum celebrates another symbolic color: platinum. On Tuesday morning the [U.S. Green Building Council](#) presented the Academy with its second **LEED Platinum** award, making the California Academy of Sciences the world’s first “Double Platinum” museum and the world’s largest Double Platinum building. Designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano, the Academy building houses an aquarium, planetarium, natural history museum, and world-class research and education programs under one living roof, standing as an embodiment of its 158-year-old mission to explore, explain, and protect the natural world.



Looking at, looking down, looking up. Photo, S.M.

The new award bolsters San Francisco’s efforts to maintain its designation as the greenest city in the country. “We couldn’t be more proud of the California Academy of Sciences for its commitment to high levels of environmental performance, and for setting the example as a leader in the San Francisco green building community and around the world,” said San Francisco Mayor Edwin Lee. “Their Double Platinum rating is truly a remarkable achievement for our City.”

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system is a consensus-based standard for evaluating high-performance, sustainable buildings, and the Platinum rating is its highest award. In October 2008, the Academy received its first LEED Platinum rating under the “New Construction” category, which focused on the building’s design and construction process.



Looking through the living roof in Rainforests of the World. Photo, S.M.

Today, the Academy received its second LEED Platinum award under the “Existing Buildings: Operations & Maintenance” category, which certifies that its day-to-day operations and business practices also meet the highest standards of sustainability.

The Academy’s operations and maintenance practices were evaluated and earned points across six different categories: sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, indoor environmental quality, and innovation and design process. Based on a wide range of green practices and

performance metrics, including staff transportation, purchasing decisions, and high recycling and composting rates, it was awarded a total of 82 points, exceeding the threshold for a Platinum certification (80 points).

“Our LEED Platinum building is a marvelous example of sustainable architecture that has wowed millions of visitors since we opened three years ago,” said Dr. Gregory Farrington, Executive Director of the Academy. “However, it is more than just a building. It is also a stage—one that has allowed us to host a wide variety of programs and exhibits about the history and future of life on Earth. Delivering these programs as sustainably as possible helps us inspire our visitors to make sustainable choices in their own lives.”

Chief Operations Office, Chris Andrews enumerated a number of strategic ways in which the Academy demonstrates sustainability. Seventy percent of its staff take public transportation, walk or bike to work. “That’s a lot of cars that are not on the roads in the Bay Area,” said Andrews. The offices use [ENERGY STAR](#) rated computers, 100% re-cycled paper, and [Green Seal](#) certified cleaning products. Over 60% of their waste is diverted from landfill into re-cycling or compost which also includes the waste from 1.5 million visitors every year. “Those visitors come from very different backgrounds and environmental philosophies,” he went on to say. “We ask our visitors to stop and choose between three clearly marked bins: landfill, re-cycling and compost.” The Academy’s Living Roof reduces the [urban heat island effect](#) and also absorbs almost all of the rain falling onto the roof which reduces the impact on the City’s storm water systems.

“Finally and arguably and most importantly,” said Andrews, “the Academy provides sustainability in education in ways that no other building can. Such as through exhibits, public programs, behind the scenes tours, professional development programs for teachers, citizens’ science projects, and research studies by high school students and university students and more beyond.”



Claude loves the single life. Photo, S.M.

Founded in 1853, the California Academy of Sciences is one of the world’s preeminent natural history museums and is an international leader in scientific research about the natural world. The 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake damaged the Academy’s original home in Golden Gate Park, but also provided a silver lining: the opportunity to reinvent the facility from the ground up. After nearly a decade of planning and the largest cultural fundraising effort in San Francisco history, the new Academy opened to the public in 2008. This major new initiative built on the Academy’s distinguished history and deepened its commitment to advancing scientific literacy, engaging the public, and documenting and conserving Earth’s natural resources.