



Press release

The architecture of the Darwin Centre

The Natural History Museum is both one of the UK's top five visitor attractions and a world-leading science research centre. The architecture of both phases of the Darwin Centre is designed to reflect this dual role, and, through innovative and ambitious design, reveal to the public for the first time the incredible range and diversity of the Museum's collections and the cutting-edge scientific research they support.

Neil Greenwood, the Natural History Museum's Programme Director for the Darwin Centre, explains, 'Many people love the Natural History Museum for its iconic Victorian Waterhouse building. However, through the Darwin Centre, we wanted to challenge this traditional perception and highlight the work of our scientists and the importance of our collections. The Darwin Centre is set to be a truly inspirational addition to the Natural History Museum when it opens to the public on 15 September 2009.'

The second phase of the Darwin Centre, designed by C.F. Møller Architects, completes the western site of the Museum, uniting Alfred Waterhouse's terracotta construction from 1881 with the first phase of the Darwin Centre, which opened in 2002. Like the rest of the Museum, the newly completed Darwin Centre plays three important roles: safeguarding the millions of specimens in the Museum's collections, providing research facilities for our scientists, and creating inspirational public spaces for visitors. It is these three uses that are central to the design of both phases of the Darwin Centre.

Darwin Centre: second phase

Designed by C.F. Møller Architects, the second phase of the Darwin Centre takes the form of a huge eight-storey concrete cocoon, surrounded by a glass atrium. This centrepiece resembles a large silk cocoon, and forms the inner protective element of the Darwin Centre's second phase. The scale of the cocoon is such that it cannot be seen in its entirety from any one position, emphasising its massive scale. The shape and size give the visitor a tangible understanding of the volume of the collections contained within.

The collections areas within the cocoon are world-class. The regulation of temperature and humidity, as well as the separation of work and storage areas, reduce the risk of pest infestations, ensuring the collections are protected and preserved for many years to come.

Public access to the scientific core of the second phase of the Darwin Centre takes the form of a visitor route up and through the cocoon, overlooking the science and collection areas.



department for
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This provides a complementary activity to the Darwin Centre's other function of protection, preservation and research. The visitor can experience the Darwin Centre as a compelling and interactive learning space, observing the scientific and research activities without interrupting scientific work in progress.

Anna Maria Indrio, lead architect and partner at C.F. Møller comments. 'C.F. Møller Architects is very proud and honoured to have been given the task of designing a framework for the Natural History Museum's unique collection of plants and insects. The large cocoon, protected by a glass atrium, encloses a fantastic treasure, reflecting evolution itself. The macro scale of the space and the size of the cocoon express the enormous importance of the collections. Iconic forms should only be used if the relationship between the building and its interpretation is entirely self-evident, as it is in this case.'

'The new building has completely changed the Natural History Museum's relationship with the site, from being an introvert to an extrovert building. It was incredibly demanding to solve the task of the second phase of the Darwin Centre in this way, but the cocoon will become a major attraction and a trademark of the Darwin Centre in the future.'

Darwin Centre: first phase

Designed by HOK International, the first phase of the Darwin Centre houses 22 million zoology specimens preserved in jars of alcohol, and provides state-of-the-art laboratories for 100 scientists.

The public areas of the first phase of the Darwin Centre showcase the scale and diversity of this collection. Looking through a glass screen into the storerooms and up through the six-storey atrium, visitors can appreciate the sheer volume of material kept there with illuminated floor-to-ceiling cases allowing a close-up view of specimens.

The collections themselves are kept in optimum storage conditions. Regulating the temperature of the storage rooms to a constant 13°C, significantly reduces fire risks. The separation of collections spaces from the work areas, and the placing of service systems outside of the building, ensures that unnecessary access to the collections is minimised.

The second phase of the Darwin Centre in numbers

- the second phase of the Darwin Centre cost £78 million
- the base construction of the second phase took around 25 months and 280 people to build
- at 60 metres long, 12 metres wide, 300 millimetres thick and 3,500 square metres, the eight-storey-high cocoon is the largest sprayed concrete, curved structure in Europe
- the cocoon holds 17 million entomology specimens and three million botany specimens in 3.3 kilometres of cabinets
- these cabinets would stretch from the Natural History Museum in South Kensington to Westminster Cathedral if put end to end
- the cocoon is approximately 30 centimetres thick and will be kept at a steady 17°C and 45 per cent relative humidity, the optimum conditions to store collections
- the second phase of the Darwin Centre has 16,000 square metres of floor space
- the building can accommodate up to 220 staff and science visitors
- there are 1,040 square metres of laboratory space in the second phase, doubling the size of the Natural History Museum's current laboratory areas
- 2,500 people per day will be able to take a self-guided journey through the collections and research areas

The second phase of the Darwin Centre is designed by Scandinavian architects C F Møller, who won an international architectural competition in 2001. It was built by BAM Construct UK Ltd.

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Notes for editors

- Major supporters of the second phase of the Darwin Centre include the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Wellcome Trust, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Cadogan Family, Professor Anthony and Mrs Angela Marmont, GlaxoSmithKline plc, the Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation, the Dr Mortimer and Theresa Sackler Foundation, the Wolfson Foundation and Anglo American plc.
- The second phase of the Darwin Centre is project managed by Manly Development Services who, since 1993, has managed projects with a cumulative value of over £1bn.
- C . F . Møller Architects is one of Scandinavia's oldest and largest architectural practices, whose recent projects have included an extension to the National Museum of Art in Copenhagen and a renovation of the Aarhus Natural History Museum, also in Denmark (having designed the original Museum in 1941). As one of the founders of Scandinavian architectural functionalism, the practice has been at the forefront of Danish design since its formation in the 1920s and is now one of the most successful architectural practices in Scandinavia.
- BAM Construct UK Ltd is one of the UK's leading construction services organisations, with a turnover exceeding £1billion. It operates throughout the UK from regional centres in Bristol, Cardiff, Coventry, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, London, Manchester, Newcastle and St Albans. BAM Construct UK Ltd is part of the €9 billion turnover European construction company Royal BAM Group.

- Other companies involved in the design and construction of the second phase of the Darwin Centre include: Fulcrum, Turner & Townsend, Arup Structures & Fothergills, David Bonnett, AIS, Schal, McGee Group, Westpile, Getjar, Watson Steel Structures, Brogan Scaffolding, Permasteelisa and Meica Services.

**For more information and images, please contact the Natural History Museum Press Office:
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