

Rainscreen Facade Case Study: The Strong National Museum of Play + CJS Architects

: Fundermax



The expansion of The Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York, is a landmark case study of modern architectural innovation and a stunning example of Fundermax panels elevating a design.

This project, a part of Rochester's revitalization effort, highlights the functional and aesthetic appeal of Fundermax's phenolic wall panel system in creating a dynamic, interactive space that resonates with the museum's playful spirit.



Situation



Nestled in the heart of Rochester, New York, The Strong National Museum of Play is the world's only collections-based museum devoted solely to play. It is a vibrant symbol of imagination and creativity, and its expansion is not merely an addition of space but a significant chapter in the city's regeneration story. The client was renovating and expanding to help match the updates happening in the community.

The expansion, skillfully managed by Project Architect Craig Jensen and Project Manager Michael Ellison of CJS Architects and executed by LeChase Construction, adds a staggering 90,000 square feet to the museum in a style that complements the developing "Neighborhood of Play." This new, walkable neighborhood aims to revitalize the downtown area, embedding The Strong Museum as a central, vibrant hub in the community.

However, the expansion faced significant material selection and design complexity challenges, especially in the wake of COVID-19 disruptions.



MATERIAL SELECTION AND OPTIMIZATION

The pandemic posed significant hurdles, causing a drastic drop in museum attendance by 70% and a consequent revenue loss of \$5.8 million, leading to budget cuts and furloughs. Despite these setbacks, the museum's key measures are on an upward trend, signaling a resilient comeback.

LeChase, the General Contractor, was initially concerned about the installation complexity and costs of the architects' design plan. Jensen recalls the proposed rainscreen facade design, "There were some initial perceptions that this was going to be very expensive. If they look at [the design] at a glance, they're apprehensive. But if they really get into it, they find out, 'Oh, hey, this actually makes some sense.'"

Kevin Scott, from CAS Reps, echoes Jensen, noting, "Usually [a special design feature] is something they just see as slowing down the project... So, one of the things that we do is make sure that all the [subcontractors] are really comfortable and set at ease."

The team prioritized educating and training the subcontractors and installers to ensure they would be comfortable installing the panels. This effort significantly reduced pushback, and Fundermax [exterior phenolic wall panels](#) emerged as the ideal solution, balancing budget constraints with creative design needs.



Situation

DESIGN COMPLEXITY

The expansion is positioned at a pivotal location in Rochester's urban landscape. It stands where a sunken, six-lane freeway once cut through, symbolizing a shift from industrial to cultural and communal priorities. As noted on the museum's [expansion campaign page](#), this project is crucial in creating a lively, engaging atmosphere that resonates with the museum's core mission.

The new museum wing is only one part of a larger project. As highlighted on the [CJS Architects website](#), additional project priorities include 201 units of market-rent housing, 17,000 square feet of mixed retail space, a 125-room all-suites hotel, and a strategically positioned 1,000-car parking garage. Additionally, a new two-way street linking significant roadways enhances accessibility and urban connectivity.

Bottom line: The soffits and rainscreen facade materials must work well with other project elements and materials. The project's success lies in its thoughtful integration and its ability to capture the attention of passersby with contrasting designs and interactive spaces.



Solution



The team chose Fundermax [Max Compact Exterior](#) phenolic panels for a few key reasons:

DESIGN OPTIONS

The choice of Fundermax panels for The Strong Museum's feature [rainscreen facade](#) and [soffit](#) was more than a mere architectural decision; it was a strategic move aligning with the project's design continuity.

Fundermax offered durable, versatile panels with lots of decor options that could fit their budget. Additionally, the Fundermax team's expertise in layout optimization and panel yield was crucial in maximizing both the aesthetic and functional value of the museum's facade.

MATERIAL PERFORMANCE

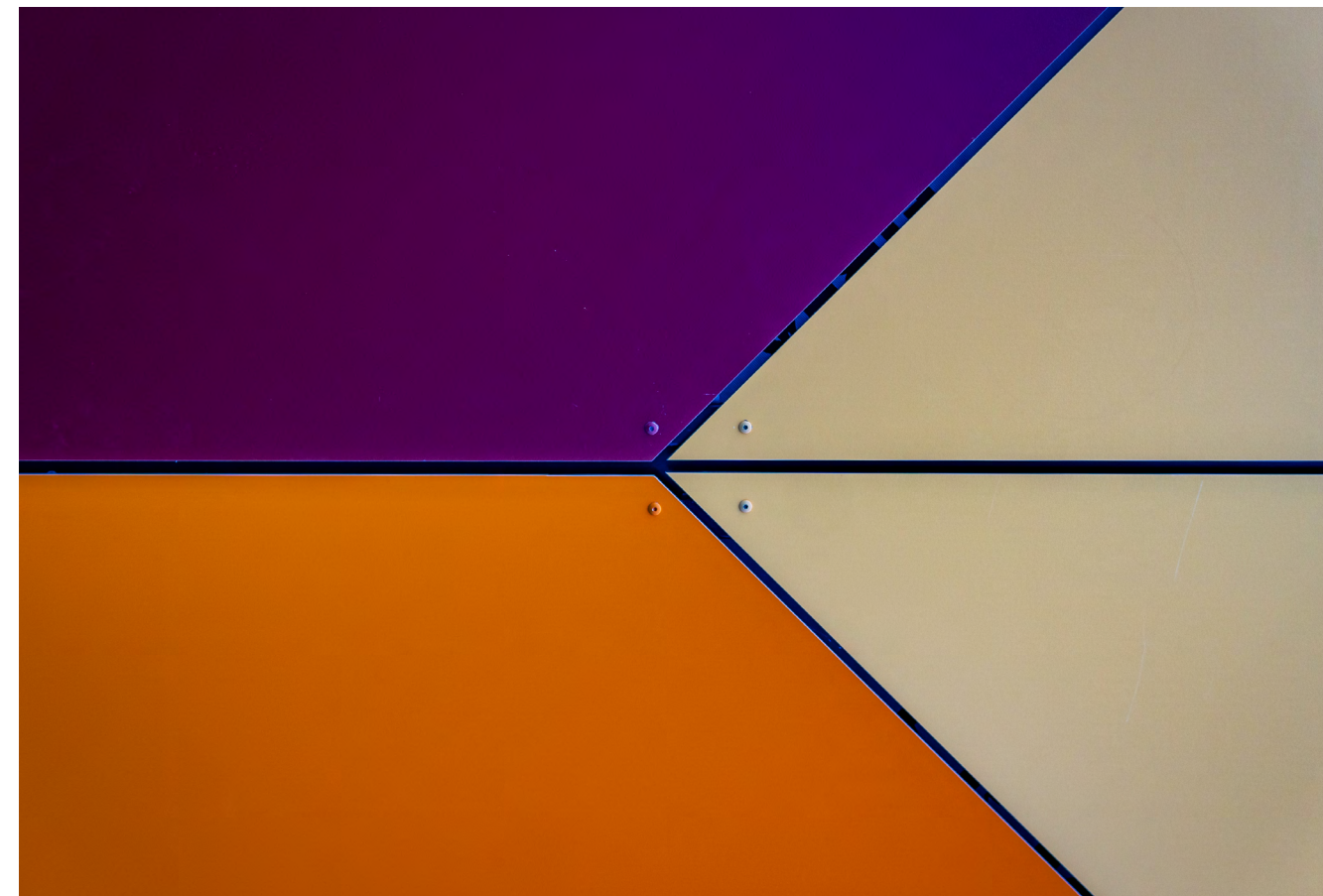
The architects were already familiar with the [benefits and capabilities of exterior phenolic wall panels](#) and recognized Fundermax as a standout solution.



Solution

Fundermax's [wide range of panel sizes](#) facilitated material optimization and fit seamlessly into the museum's budget constraints. Additionally, Fundermax panels' double-sided nature and color-matching screws provided unrivaled versatility.

When considering alternatives like metal, the team quickly realized the limitations they would face, such as increased workload, risk of human error, and wider joints. Scott noted, "Metal was looked at as a cost alternative, but once the design was settled on, there was no way you could do that with a metal panel... The cost to do that with other materials would definitely have been significantly more, and I don't think it would have looked as good." In contrast, Fundermax panels allowed for complex designs with a superior finish without these complications.



**Fundermax panels allowed for
complex designs with a superior
finish without complications.**

Results



The project's outcome is a testament to the successful [integration of Fundermax panels with the existing design](#). Fundermax panel reliability and consistency ensured a smooth installation process and a stunning result.

The museum now boasts an eye-catching, 3D aesthetic rainscreen facade that draws the attention of visitors and passersby alike. The local representative from Fundermax, [CAS Reps](#), played a pivotal role in optimizing the layout of the panels, ensuring a high yield and fulfilling the architects' design intent. The ease of installation and the panel versatility played crucial roles in material optimization, addressing both aesthetic aspirations and practical concerns.



Results

The expansion of The Strong National Museum of Play is a case study exemplifying the effective use of Fundermax phenolic panels in modern architecture. Though a smaller part of the larger narrative, the exterior Fundermax project was pivotal in realizing the vision of an innovative, engaging space. Fundermax's commitment to quality, versatility, and customer satisfaction aligns perfectly with the project's ethos, reinforcing its status not just as a phenolic panel manufacturer but as a partner in architectural innovation.

Scott highlighted this broad impact: "It elevates the level of competitiveness with architectural design. They see that, 'Wow, a project like this can be built?'" Jensen agrees, "There's a conversation between design firms; people are looking at what other people are doing, and that elevates the design conversation."

"This is so good for the area," emphasizes Scott. "It's jobs like this that elevate the use of rainscreen claddings. And the ingenuity & creativity of that panel. We're just taking a flat panel, and look what they were able to do with that."



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The Fundermax Difference



Fundermax's involvement, though initially viewed as a potential challenge due to misconceptions about cost and complexity, proved to be a pivotal factor in achieving design and performance goals.

Ellison noted a few reasons he believes Fundermax stands out in the market. First, Fundermax's manufacturing history provides a depth of experience and reliability. Second, its panels offer superior durability compared to other phenolic panel manufacturers. Lastly, Ellison emphasizes the high level of trust they can place in the Fundermax product, knowing the company stands behind it with its [comprehensive warranties](#) that include labor, not just materials.

Jensen agreed, noting that it was an overall smooth process with no surprises. Even with a somewhat unique project, they were able to complete it without running into obstacles or pitfalls, and everyone was happy with their experience and the results.

The expansion of The Strong National Museum of Play is a story of resilience, innovation, and community engagement. Fundermax's involvement was instrumental in achieving the project's goals, as its panels provided the desired aesthetic appeal, durability, and practicality.

This project stands as a bright example of how thoughtful architectural design, paired with strategic material selection and collaborative effort, can not only overcome significant challenges but also contribute profoundly to a city's cultural and social rejuvenation.

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Fundermax.us

(980) 299-0035

contactFNA@fundermax.biz

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