

# ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

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EXTENSION + PRESERVATION PROJECT

## MICROSITE ESSAY

[www.buildingproject.gardnermuseum.org](http://www.buildingproject.gardnermuseum.org)

### BUILDING ON A LEGACY

Anne Hawley, Norma Jean Calderwood Director

*Anne Hawley, Norma Jean Calderwood Director, outlines why the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum made the bold decision to build.*



*John Singer Sargent working in the Gothic Room, 1903.  
Photography probably by Isabella Gardner.  
© Gardner Museum.*

I am often asked, “why a new building for the Gardner?” When Isabella Gardner opened her doors to the public on New Year’s Night 1903, she presented a new context for art in America by creating a museum where visitors experienced music, the beauty of gardens, and historic and contemporary art, all in the highly personal setting of her courtyard palace. At once her Museum was itself a work of art in totality and a “salon” that fostered the notable artists, scholars and musicians of her day.

Today, her palace and collection remain as she conceived them and her passion for patronage lives on in the Museum’s artist-in-residency program and vibrant public programs in the performing arts, horticulture and the visual arts. With this important new building project, we, the administration and Board of Trustees, knew that we were traversing bold and challenging territory by proposing an extension of the historic museum building. We did not enter into this process lightly. Intense long-ranged planning and a clear commitment to preservation formed the foundation of our ambitions.

***“I bequeath all my interest in the pictures, statuary, works of art, bric-a-brac, furniture, books and papers...in trust as a Museum for the education and enjoyment of the public forever.”***

– Will and Codicil of Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1924

The museum today faces challenges that Isabella Gardner could not have imagined. The museum that she founded a century ago with 2,000 annual visitors now welcomes close to 200,000 visitors each year. The historic Tapestry Room, one of the nation’s preeminent galleries for viewing tapestries, now hosts the Museum’s concert series with audiences of over ten thousand a season. While increasing numbers of visitors upholds Isabella Gardner’s mandate that her Museum remain “for the education and enjoyment of the public forever,” this demand results in additional pressure on the historic building and collection.

***“We chose Renzo Piano because he encapsulates the extraordinary combination of architect, artist, and builder...which is what contributes to his amazing capacity to envision great buildings and make them work”***

– Anne Hawley

To alleviate these pressures and ensure the Museum’s future, we made the bold and important choice of expanding the Gardner Museum with a new Renzo Piano building, itself to be a work of art and a worthy addition to Isabella Gardner’s extraordinary collection. Incorporating Renzo Piano’s signature talent for clarity and beautiful proportions, integrating old and new building fabric, and his masterful handling of light, and his uncompromising attention to detail, the new building will be a celebrated cultural and architectural landmark for Boston, the Fenway Cultural District and the region.

This reorganization of our physical spaces will ensure that visitors in the future will be more deeply engaged in the creative life of the Gardner Museum and better able to connect with Isabella Gardner’s legacy through inspiring encounters with art, music and horticulture. New spaces will include an acoustically sublime hall for music and scholarly and artistic programs; a naturally illuminated gallery for historic and contemporary art exhibitions; an inspiring classroom that will fire the imagination of children and adults alike; and new conservation labs that will better support Isabella Gardner’s celebrated collection. In the palace, historic gallery spaces will be returned closer to Isabella Gardner’s original compositions, including the Tapestry Room. The new building will also feature improved services and highly visible greenhouses and gardens to provide a beautiful and inspiring experience for visitors.

With her museum, Isabella Stewart Gardner choreographed an experience to captivate the mind, elevate the senses and awaken the spirit of all who visited. We build on this legacy today.

*Including also a video produced by: SheridanWorks.*



*Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1888. Photograph.  
© Gardner Museum.*

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**EDITORS’ NOTE** • Please visit the Museum’s new website dedicated to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum’s Extension and Preservation Project, at: [WWW.BUILDINGPROJECT.GARDERMUSEUM.ORG](http://WWW.BUILDINGPROJECT.GARDERMUSEUM.ORG). Visitors to the site, which was launched in January 21, 2010, can hear architect Renzo Piano, Director Anne Hawley, and others talk about the new building project and the Museum and can view updates and images from the construction site. The site will be updated regularly so visitors are encouraged to visit again and again.