



Photo: GGN



Photo: Alan Karchmer/Smithsonian

Photo: Roman Edwards

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE Washington, DC

GUSTAFSON GUTHRIE NICHOL Seattle, Washington

Located at the junction between the Washington Monument, the White House grounds and the National Mall, the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), tells the story of African American life, history and culture in the United States. The landscape design is elegant, simple and integrates the museum into the larger composition of the Mall with curving stone and concrete pathways and stone walls that draw the character of the adjacent Washington Monument grounds into the site. As a major institution where ideas of permanence and longevity are forefront, stone was a natural material choice for the site paving, benches, site walls, and water feature.

Design goals for the landscape included entries that provide symbolic thresholds for the Museum, places for visitors to gather in the landscape, and a secure perimeter around the building. A raised plinth made of gently curving stone-clad retaining walls provides a consistent base to the building and also acts as the secure site perimeter. The two entries are marked by a water feature on the south and a stone retaining wall on the north, juxtaposing the permanence and weight of stone with the ephemeral qualities of moving water and reflections. These thresholds symbolically link past, present, and future to reinforce the location of the site as a critical context for the museum itself. The site is designed to encourage visitors to extend the museum experience outside by lingering throughout the landscape.

The six-foot wide north security wall, is clad and capped with Mesabi Black granite. The stone is hand-polished on the top surface to create a sparkling horizon line below the building and honed on the sides. The water feature has two halves: a sloped surface with water moving over raised wedges of granite and a still reflective pool, also paved with granite.

- Water Feature Consultant:** CMS Collaborative
- Landscape Contractor:** Ruppert Landscape
- Stone Suppliers:** Coldspring / Structural Stone
- Stone Installer:** Rugo Stone, LLC
- Stones Used:** Mesabi Black® granite, Impala Black granite

JUROR COMMENTS

Love the building. Form is direct celebration of African architecture. Landscape is lovely. Water feature is terrific.

With its important mission and prominent location, the landscape design of this project had many challenging constraints. The stonework was executed in a manner that is both subtle and respectful. It quietly provides a perimeter of security barriers, while employing beautiful stone shapes, water features and signage to give a sense of relief and reflection on the experience of the museum. The end result is one that is timeless and directly links the building to its surrounding context.