

# DECOR MAINe

| ARCHITECTURE ART DESIGN EXPERIENCE FOOD SUSTAINABILITY |

OCTOBER 2021

**THE  
CHILDREN'S  
MUSEUM &  
THEATRE OF  
MAINE DEBUTS**  
on Thompson's  
Point

**A K'PORT  
GETAWAY GETS A  
CONTEMPORARY TWIST**

## Black, White & Neutral ALL OVER

*A Serene Retreat on  
Rockport's  
Rocky Coast*

**Forging a New  
Future for Portland's  
Fore Street**

**PLUS!**

**STYLISH  
SHOPS ACROSS  
THE STATE**





A water feature is enlivened by a mural in blues and whites by Rachel Gloria Adams.

# Child's Play

THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM &  
THEATRE OF MAINE GROWS INTO ITS NEW  
HOME ON THOMPSON'S POINT

by Allison Paige photographs by Séan Alonzo Harris



The building's industrial exterior sports gray and blue tiles that playfully suggest the shimmering Fore River nearby. *left* Rachel Gloria Adams's vivid mural complements a Rube Goldberg-inspired ball feature.

**T**he Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine has had a growth spurt. Formerly located in Downtown Portland in a Greek Revival building that was high on charm but low on wiggle room, the organization recently opened a state-of-the-art facility at Thompson's Point. Just off I-295, the new location offers easy accessibility, ample parking, food and drink nearby, and most importantly, room to grow.

Executive Director Julie Butcher Pezzino says, "We could not be more thrilled with how the design came together. It is the perfect combination of playful, classy, modern, and industrial. It shows kids that this is a place to have fun, but also that we pay close attention to the look and feel of the places where we play."

Bruner/Cott Architects of Boston partnered with general contractor Zachau Construction of Freeport to create a space that is a blend of industrial and ingenuity. Greg Belew of Hands On! Studio, a national museum-planning organization, advised on exhibit design, while Consulting Exhibits Director Chris Sullivan commissioned local artists and artisans to further tie the space into the community. Situated on an acre of land, the 30,000-square-foot building offers three floors of recreation and exploration, with outdoor space that includes a Ted Carter-landscaped playground, picnic area, and meditative labyrinth by Calen Rayne of Sacred Landscapes in Buxton.

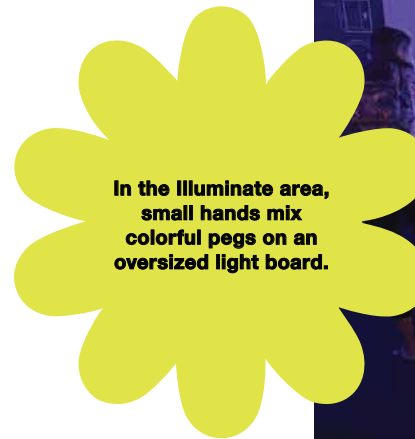
The building's boxy utilitarianism looks at home among Thompson Point's other industrial structures, but the eye-catching facade makes it easy to spot, patterned playfully in blue and gray shingle-sized tiles that evoke the sea and sky. Inside, guests are greeted by friendly staffers at the solid maple modular reception desk crafted by local woodworker Matt Hutton of Studio 24b. The vivid yellow, orange, and turquoise tiles backing "Climb," the lobby's 30-foot indoor climbing structure, make a color-blocked

A climbing structure backed in bright Acrylite panels creates a kaleidoscopic background for the modular reception desk by Studio 24b.

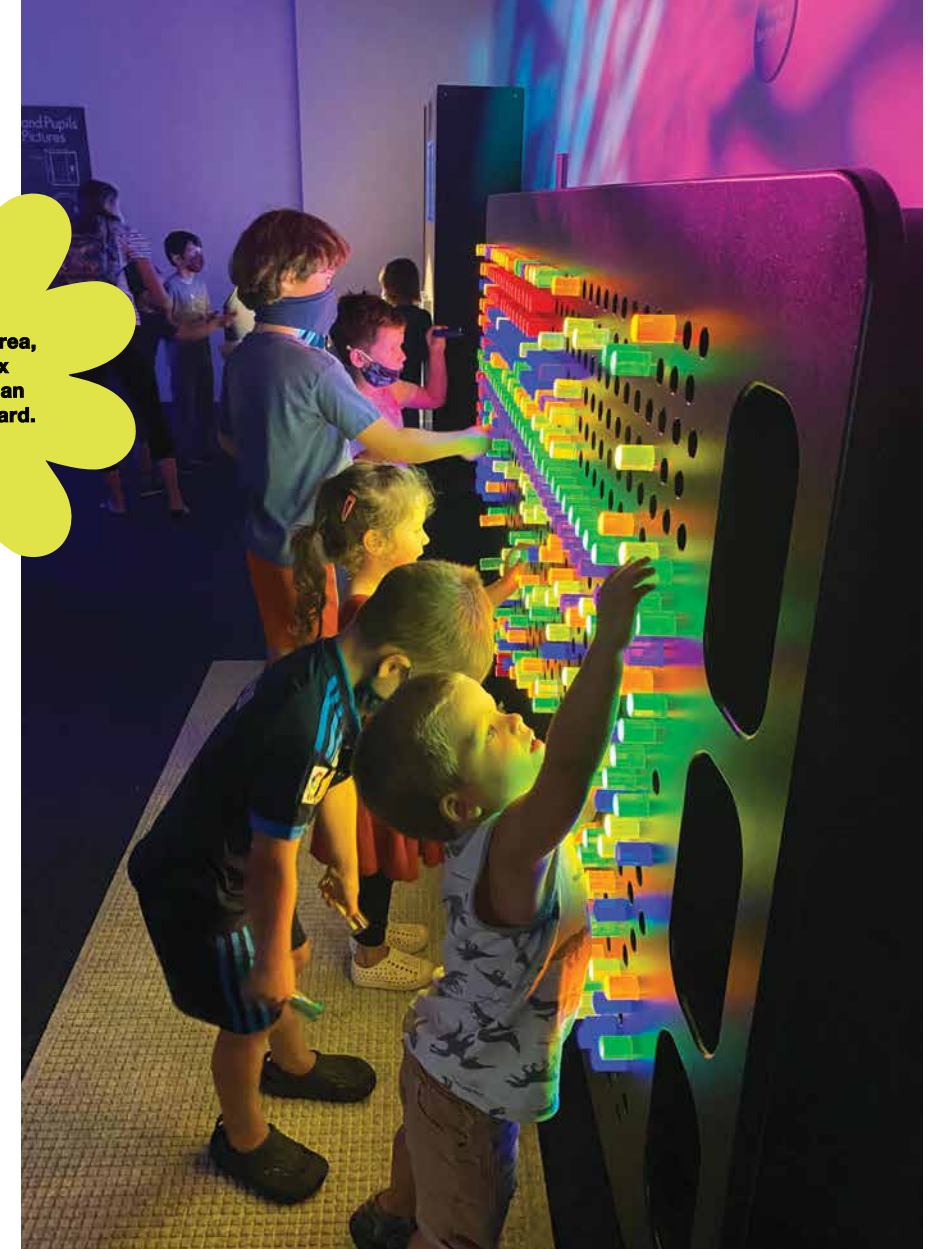


“At the Museum & Theatre, we want everyone to feel comfortable and that they belong.

We take **KIDS** and their **JOY** seriously, and I think the building sends that message.”



In the Illuminate area, small hands mix colorful pegs on an oversized light board.



backdrop to the area. When sunlight filters through the structure, the silhouettes of clambering children play on the tiles.

Also on the ground floor, Maddy's Theatre (named after the honorary museum chair Madeline Corson's mother) is the country's oldest continually operating children's theater. The proscenium stage and 100-seat house are a major step up from the former building's black box. Replete with a cutting-edge sound system, green room, and set-building workshop, the theater will mount productions for young audiences and intergenerational plays with actors of all ages.

On the second floor, museum regulars will recognize beloved classics like the reimagined *Our Neighborhood*, fancifully painted by Patrick Corrigan. Children can explore whimsical shops, services, and transportation, from the familiar red fire engine to a new Amtrak train and an air-traffic control tower with a radio receiver that relays takeoffs and landings of nearby Portland International Jetport happening just out the window. An animal hospital, diner, fish market, and lobster boat encourage imaginative play and reflect the

unique fabric of the local community. Chris shares how carefully the color palette was considered by the designers, working from photographs of Maine: “The yellow is actually the yellow from [a] lobsterman's slicker. The red is pulled from a barn, and the greens are pulled from a field. We're representing the state.”

In Lighthouse Cove, the toddler area, an ever-popular Bernoulli blower provides even the smallest visitors a way to experiment, levitating beach balls and scarves on a fast-moving column of air. With large picture windows that overlook the shimmering Fore River below, the space is bright, airy, and beautiful.

Visitors can explore other cultures in the “Meet Our Neighbors” installation, currently hosting The Korean Language School, on the way to the art gallery, home to Ashley Bryan's *Beautiful Blackbird*. The revolving space now features artwork curated by Indigo Arts Alliance as well as oversized illustrations from Bryan's book on fabric-covered walls. The exhibit includes features that allow visitors to watch a video of the author reading his book, record their own stories, and even dance and frolic with the book's fantastical birds on an interactive screen.

Just beyond is MakerSpace, a workshop where a wealth of tools and

recycled materials are available for guests to make and carry home their own creations.

The third floor, dedicated to STEM learning, provides hands-on ways for children to experiment using air, water, and light. A Rube Goldberg–inspired ball installation and a hands-on water feature, “Ramp Up” and Go With the Flow, respectively, demonstrate the laws of physics in wonderfully playful and splashy ways (child-sized slickers are available). The rooms are decorated with colorful geometric murals by Rachel Gloria Adams that add “sophistication and abstraction” to the space, Chris notes.

In the Illuminate section, the museum’s famed Camera Obscura takes center stage among other installations that allow guests to experiment with light and shadow.

From the Mountains to the Sea, the Maine Watershed area, includes aquariums filled with native fresh- and saltwater sea life, dioramas, a touch tank, and a teaching classroom. The space features author-illustrator Kevin Hawks’s landscapes of locales like Moxie Falls, Mount Katahdin, and Pemaquid. The easel-sized paintings were enlarged into impressionistic wall-spanning murals, explains Chris. “What happens is, when you step back, you see these playful illustrations. When you get up close, you can see every brushstroke, and they sort of have this very Winslow Homer feel.”

Inclusiveness and accessibility are at the heart of the museum’s mission, with an Americans with Disabilities Act–compliant design that allows for wheelchairs and differently abled guests to enjoy the many interactive exhibits, as well as funding that provides low-income families and rural school communities access to the museum on field trips and reduced-fare passes. Says Julie Butcher Pezzino, “At the Museum & Theatre, we want everyone to feel comfortable and that they belong. We take kids and their joy seriously, and I think the building sends that message.”

The facility is the realization of a long-held dream, shares Barbee Gilman, Capital Campaign cochair. “This is 10 years in the making. Once the museum merged with the Children’s Theatre of Maine in 2008, the necessity for a larger space became more evident than ever.” Barbee spearheaded the fundraising campaign, helping to raise more than \$15 million from over 500 donors.

Chris shares, “We couldn’t have done it without her. Her dedication, her enthusiasm. She willed it into being.”

More than ever, the Children’s Museum & Theatre of Maine offers the community an exciting and modern place to play, learn, and discover. A joyful blend of form and function, its new home feels as vibrant and dynamic as its young visitors. And rest assured, while it may look all grown-up, it is still young at heart. ■



An outdoor play space includes climbing structures, a picnic area, and a sand-scape replete with diggers.