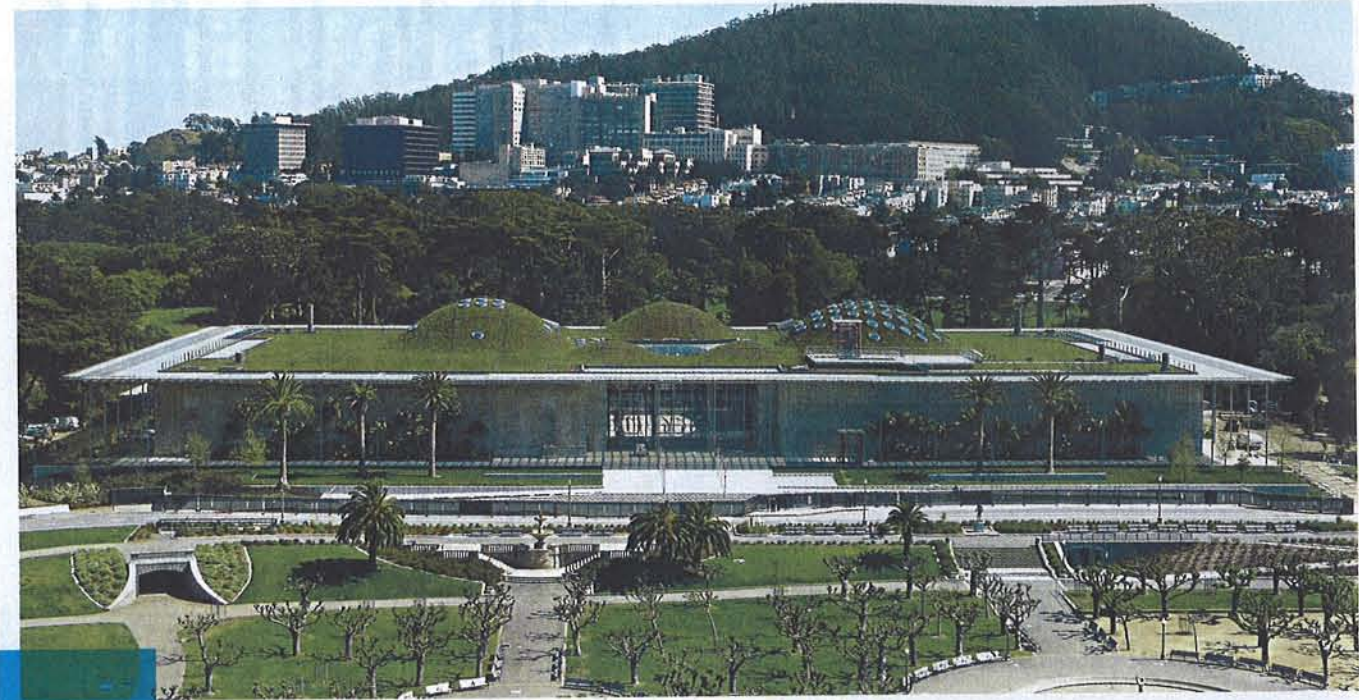




The Greatest Museum in the World

(It even has live penguins!)

By Heather Millar



THE CALIFORNIA ACADEMY of Sciences has long been a heavyweight in scientific circles, with its 300 or so researchers fanning out around the globe to investigate the natural world and one of the planet's largest collections of scientific specimens — around 20 million in all. But the San Francisco institution's museum was a bit outdated. Imagine a Victorian library with fish, alligators, and dioramas instead of books.

Next month, though, that will all change, and in a big way. At the end of September, the Academy will throw open the doors to its completely remodeled facility: an aquarium, a planetarium, and a natural-history museum all in one. The museum's website trumpets the Academy as

"poised to become one of the greatest and greenest museums in the world."

And that's not just PR hype. The remodeled Academy has quite a few claims to greatness: a price tag nearing \$500 million, a cutting-edge design by Italian architect Renzo Piano, green building techniques for helping the museum blend into its Golden Gate Park setting and to create a new sustainability standard for public buildings, areas of research collections that are open to visitors, an expanded education program, hundreds of jewel tanks to showcase the stunning diversity of aquatic life, and live animals throughout the building — including penguins in the updated African Hall.

Here are a few of the coolest reasons to make the Academy part of your next trip to the West Coast:

Madagascar, Borneo, and Costa Rica. Then, take an elevator to the Amazonian Flooded Forest to view the fish and electric eels from an underwater tunnel.

2 The world's deepest coral-reef display From the surface or from five windows at different levels in the 25-foot-deep tank, you can take in the beauty of a living Philippine coral reef, one of the most assorted coral reefs in the world. The 212,000-gallon tank will house hard and soft corals, sharks, rays, and more than 4,000 colorful reef fishes.



1 A four-story living rain forest Beneath a glass dome that's 90 feet across, walk up a spiraling ramp through three stories of tropical life: orchids; 1,600 animals, including 600 free-flying birds and butterflies; lizards that "fly"; chameleons; and even a bat cave, to introduce you to the rain forests of



3 A planetarium featuring "immersive digital video" The new Morrison Planetarium seeks to be like an IMAX movie theater, enveloping the audience. You'll feel like you're on Mars or exploring extrasolar planets (in other words, planets that lie beyond our solar system) as you take in shows that use a combination of projection technology and software advances made possible by video-game companies in nearby Silicon Valley.

4 A roof that's really a hilltop As you leave the Academy, take a look at the 2.5-acre green roof, perhaps the world's most complex: It's designed to mimic the surrounding hills of San Francisco. The undulating surface has been planted with an eye toward creating an ecosystem. Beach strawberries, miniature lupine, and seven other native species will provide habitats for endangered birds and butterflies.