

NO ORDINARY MUSEUM

San Francisco's new California Academy of Sciences has rain forests, an eco-roof, and an albino alligator

AS ANY VISITOR to San Francisco knows, Golden Gate Park is magical. Where else can you find a Dutch windmill, a world-class art museum, and a herd of bison all within 1½ miles? But the park's latest attraction is hard to top: the new California Academy of Sciences—an aquarium, planetarium, natural history museum, and research institution all under one spectacular living roof.

Architect Renzo Piano had to find homes for the Academy's 20 million scientific specimens, 30 PhD scientists, and all manner of plants, animals, and marine life—and for exhibits ranging from a colony of African penguins to the world's deepest living coral-reef display. The result is a building that beguiles visitors and sets a new standard for sustainable architecture.

The Shire-like roof of the new California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park.



IT'S A JUNGLE IN HERE Shown near completion, the four-story living tropical rain forest includes an elevator that descends underwater into an Amazonian Flooded Forest. Rain forests in Borneo, Madagascar, and Costa Rica are also represented, with 1,600 live animals ranging from exotic reptiles to a cave full of bats.

LIVING ROOF Architect Renzo Piano's undulating roof features 1.7 million plants (with 9 species of California natives, including beach strawberries and miniature lupine) and 7 dramatic hills that roll over the Academy's domed planetarium, rain forest, and aquarium exhibits. You can view it close up from a rooftop platform. >32

BY ALLISON ARIEFF | PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS BROENING