Category: Non-Traditional Projects  
**Project Type:** Special Programming / Group Events Open-Air Pavilion  
**Address:** 1200 W Washington St, Indianapolis, IN 46222  
**Completion:** May 3, 2017

**Architect’s Statement**

In 2015, the Lilly Endowment approached the Indianapolis Zoo with a transformative opportunity – the Endowment would provide a $10 million grant to the Zoo, on the condition that it be used to implement a game-changing initiative that benefits the community institution’s long-term sustainability.

With these broad parameters in mind, the Zoo identified a project that would align with its strategic master plan objective to attract, engage, and accommodate visitors during the shoulder seasons and on days with inclement or marginal weather.

The solution was to create an open-air special events facility that is protected from the weather and able to support a wide variety of sometimes-simultaneous group activities, including concerts, picnics, and private events, while also expanding on existing shoulder season events such as Christmas at the Zoo in December and ZooBoo in October (previously, this purpose was fulfilled by a semi-permanent 400-person tent located next to back-of-house areas near the Zoo’s main entrance).

Importantly, this new facility would have to be compelling enough to be an attraction of its own, but “quiet” enough to be transformed for events and programming.
The resulting Bicentennial Pavilion and Promenade is modeled after an Indiana forest, feeling much like a lush rain forest and crafted primarily from natural materials. The Pavilion’s eleven steel tree-like “pods” provide 40,000 SF of weather-protected space and a unique, high-drama environment for up to 1000 seated event attendees.

Each pod consists of 63 individual wood beams, ranging from 83 feet long and 19,000 pounds to just three feet and 25 pounds. Translucent roofing materials allows sunlight to filter through to the ground below, and the entire “forest” of pods is held together with 6,424 bolts and lag screws. Beneath the 35-foot canopy, a hearth of rough-back quarry block limestone serves as a visual centerpiece and will provide warmth during colder weather.

In addition to special events and group activities, the Pavilion’s forest-like environment also provides a unique location for the Zoo’s newest bird exhibition, Magnificent Macaws, with a custom-designed stage and perch that showcases the birds flight through the Pavilion every hour.

**Sustainable and Environmental Design**

Environmental sustainability is obviously a chief concern of the Zoo and part of its mission as an organization. In this project, that intention largely manifested itself in how the site treats rainwater, which is primarily collected on-site and percolates into the aquifer reducing discharge to city sewers.

When water contacts the Pavilion’s canopy, it is funneled into the pods, down their rain screens of custom-designed, laser-cut weathered steel, to a sunken, plant-filled bed below, through a water quality unit, and finally to a 14-foot deep water detention bed of free draining stones, designed to accommodate 100-year flood events. Within each bed are plants selected to thrive in saturated environments and water intake pipes that are intentionally raised above grade to encourage natural percolation through the soil.