

“Building for Art” Script and In-App Content

Date: May 20, 2016

In-App Copy

Short Description

Walk through the making of the new SFMOMA, with 99% Invisible producer Avery Trufelman.

Long Description

You came to see the art, and SFMOMA's new building is designed to help you do that. Join Avery Trufelman, a producer with the popular design podcast *99% Invisible*, on a walking exploration of SFMOMA's building, from 1995 to its newly expanded present. Together, you'll climb hidden stairways, glimpse secret views, and meet a host of designers, artists, and thinkers along the way.

Featured Designers and Artists

Snøhetta, Mario Botta, John Chamberlain, Brice Marden, Agnes Martin, Wayne Thiebaud

Floors

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7

Credits

Narrator: Avery Trufelman of *99% Invisible*

Other voices (in order of appearance): Craig Dykers, Mario Botta, Peter Samis, Aaron Dorf, Lara Kaufman, Sam Brisette, Neda Mostafavi, Ruth Berson

Scriptwriters: Stephanie Pau and Marianne McCune

Executive Producer: Stephanie Pau with SFMOMA

Executive Editors: Stephanie Pau and Jennifer Dunlop Fletcher with SFMOMA

Music: Seth Samuel

Sound Design: Andrew Roth

Script

Hi it's Avery Trufelman from 99 percent invisible. I'm so excited to walk you through the new SFMOMA and through the minds of its designers. But, to get started you just need to meet me in that big atrium on the 1st floor, right inside the entrance.

Go

And by the way, if your ticket has a start time on it, wait until then to start our walk.

Atrium by entrance

Hey. Ok, move to an out of the way spot near this entrance. I'm not just saying that to get you out of the way of other visitors. I actually want you to be able to look at them.

Watch people.

Craig Dykers: *When do they stop? When do they smile?*

Where do they look?

Dykers: *Are their postures sort of sloping down or more erect?*

These are some of the questions Craig Dykers and the other designers of SFMOMA's new building asked themselves when they were planning the new space.

Dykers: *If you see people creaking their head up...*

People typically don't.

Dykers: *Generally only from side to side, rarely up and down unless we're saying no.*

Look up at the white mobile, its tentacles hovering silently above this spacious entry hall. Do you see it?

Take a walk beneath it and see how it changes.

Then, from somewhere comfortable (maybe with your back to a column), just take in this whole scene. The light. The art. The people.

The architecture firm Snohetta wanted to make a building that does the impossible: allows you to be in two places at once. To be together with the people around you in this big public space -- and to be alone, in some very internal place.

Because a good museum has to act as a bridge - like the one that stretches across the atrium, above the mobile. But a museum has to act as a bridge between the part of us that lives in the chaos of the world, and the part of us that lives in our hearts and minds. The part that pulses or quakes or feels or thinks in the presence of a great work of art.

I'm Avery Trufelman. I spend a good part of my time talking about architecture and design on a podcast called *99% Invisible*. Now I actually get to walk you through the making of this brand new building.

Building a bridge between art and people is hard. So as we wind our way up to SFMOMA's highest public floor, I'm gonna tell you about the challenges this building's designers faced. And we'll look at how they responded. And what they made.

We just have to be careful to stay out of people's way while we walk!

Go

So let's go. Let's wander over to the foot of the stairway.

Don't go up just yet, just stand to the side.

To be clear: this part of the building has been here for more than 20 years. It's where we're headed next that's brand new.

Foot of stairs

So stay here a second - out of the way of course - and take a good look at these stairs.

A Swiss architect designed the part of the building we're leaving. And this is not his staircase.

Take a quick look at your screen to see what the old staircase looked like. Mario Botta's steps were like a tunnel - drawing you in from the atrium and steering you toward a quieter, calmer place.

A Swiss architecture student once told Mario Botta that his buildings were like an oyster, rough shells protecting the pearl inside. And he answered, 'I like to think all architecture is protection.' A womb, he said, a place to re-find your balance.

Now look up at these stairs again. It sounds weird to say, but this staircase is actually designed to make you feel a little off-balance.

Go

We'll take a slow walk up the stairs now. (Or you can always jump on the elevator behind you and meet me at the top).

So unlike the Botta staircase, drawing us into the comfort of a womb, this one is designed partly to challenge people.

Dykers: *It's an awkward route.*

It's at weird angles. It jigs and jags.

Dykers: *People tend to be more polite when you all share the same problem.*

Like we're all in this together. At the top you'll walk straight ahead.

Top of the stairs on floor 2

When you've reached the top - where you should keep going straight, by the way - maybe on some subconscious level, it feels like completing an obstacle course with a group of strangers. Like, congratulations, you've been initiated. You're part of the team now.

Dykers: *The more we feel connected to people around us, the more we can accept challenges.*

And be ready for art.

Ticket lines

If there's a crowd here (and there probably is) weave your way to the right of the lines. Head into the open space where the ceiling is twice as high as before. And when you're in the clear, stop for a second so you can look around.

This is the new building. And one thing you'll notice is, so far, it is nothing like a womb. We're inside, but we're as connected to the outside as we can possibly be.

Go

Wander over to the right of that blonde wooden staircase and you'll find a whole wall of glass doors and windows. Walk further to find the big, roman steps leading down to another glass wall and another entrance.

Roman steps

See the giant steel coils of Richard Serra's *Sequence* sculpture? It's right there next to the sidewalk. Here, the city is mixed into the museum into the art. Turn and look at the wall above the elevators -- you'll see artist Sol Lewitt's blue and white undulations.

All of this is free. Absolutely anyone can come bask in the presence of these works.

So, as a first step towards building a bridge between us and the art, this big porous entryway is saying: Hey, you don't have to cross very far! Art is for everyone.

Next challenge: how to carry that feeling into the rest of the museum.

Because here is also where, if you want to see more--

-- you have to line up and show a ticket. Prepare to shuffle through white-walled rooms. To grasp for meaning in the inexplicable. To look for beauty where it might seem absent.

Dykers: It's hard to look at art. It is. It's hard for most people to spend great deals of time in an intense relationship with a work of art.

Let's see if this building can save us.

Go

From wherever you've roamed, go back towards the elevators and get in line, if there is one. Get ready to show your ticket. (If you don't have one yet, you can buy it on your phone right now.)

And as we head upstairs - just one floor up - look at the people around you. They may be excited. But they also might be mentally squirming.

MONTAGE:

Where do I go first?

What should I see here?

There's so much in this place.

Am I gonna get this?

Am I gonna miss it...you know the big meaning of this fantastic work of art that everyone gets but me?

Maybe I don't have an eye.

I'm afraid I'm gonna get bored.

Will there be art that speaks to black culture and struggle and beauty?

What am I taking part in?

I don't have an objective.

I feel like I went to art school so I feel like should get it. And if I don't, then I feel like I missed something or...I'm stupid.

Bottom of stairs to 3

So we're going up one level, to the 3rd floor.

Go

Take the stairs if you don't need an elevator.

Keep walking up the stairs to Floor 3

One way to put it is: it can be easy to lose track of fun in a museum. You are statistically likely to yawn. Or at least feel tired.

At the top of the stairs, you'll have to wind around to your right, back to the elevators.

All of those uncomfortable, anxious thoughts and feelings were on the minds of the Snohetta architects when they started thinking about how to make this new building for art.

MONTAGE:

Dykers: Is it possible to make a museum that is most comforting and familiar while also being challenging?

Lara Kaufman: You know, how do you make a space that feels alive?

Sam Brisette: How to make sure that the experience doesn't get boring.

Kaufman: The problem of feeling tired.

Dykers: How do we...

Kaufman: How do we...

Is it possible to create a place that allows for different rhythms?

Kaufman: Includes spaces for people to stop and rest...

Aaron Dorf: How to create kind of the cleanest palate for artworks?

Dykers: Is it possible to make a museum that allows you to open your mind and to sense the extremes of life, both fear and calm, comfort and...

Elevator lobby 3rd floor

From here on the 3rd floor, just take a walk around to the back side of the elevators (either side is ok).

You'll find yourself in a sort of sea of mobiles, by the artist Alexander Calder. And I've never seen this many in once place. It's so beautiful.

Alexander Calder Gallery

Another glass wall on this gallery. And more access to the outdoors.

Step outside and wander through the sculpture terrace.

Check out the greens of the living wall.

Peter Samis: *Connecting art to life is really desirable.*

Peter Samis has been with SFMOMA trying to make art accessible for more than three decades.

Samis: You don't want it to be in a bell jar all its own where it kind of suffocates. I mean to the extent that it can be part of our lives, the more the better! It shouldn't just be like these little lab specimens preserved, you know, kind of pickled in a vacuum!

Amen! That is part of why SFMOMA chose the architects from Snohetta to design this building. They are especially known for buildings that feel a part of - not separate from - their surroundings. They *study* the landscape.

Dykers: We think of landscape as the mountains or the trees or the kind of beautiful forests that lie outside of cities. But all cities are built on some form of landscape, and while it may be buried under

the asphalt, your feet know it's there because you're walking up and down. Your skin knows there's a landscape because you can feel the wind. Your eyes know there's a landscape because you can see the clouds going by or hills in the distance. This wonderfully rich soup of what it means to be alive, gets poured into the buildings.

Snohetta calls that wonderfully rich soup the “conditions.” And, in the case of museums, conditions include even our anxieties and our yawns.

Go

From wherever you are, walk through the gallery of Calders and back around to the elevator doors. I'll guide you from there.

In front of the bank of elevators

Ok now turn so that you have the elevators on your right. Your back is to the windows and the terrace. And you're going to walk straight down this hallway - just a short walk - until you see a few dozen miniature studies of the tall, wavy, building we're standing in.

"Model Behavior" exhibition

Stop and check out all of the tiny, made-up buildings.

I'm Aaron Dorf I'm an architect with Snohetta I'm Lara Kaufman, Samuel Brisette, Craig Dykers, I'm Neda Mostafavi --

When the architects at Snohetta begin to imagine a building, everyone at the firm contributes.

Lara Kaufman: So the very beginning is actually scary, because it could be anything.

And these models give you a taste of how their ideas about the shape of the building evolved.

Aaron Dorf: You know design process is like this super fun game of telephone where everyone takes someone else's interpretation and reinterprets it.

Neda Mostafavi: And sometimes the misreadings are really the most productive things.

Dykers: There's a model that was very influential to many of us, and it's a poured plaster model. so it looks like gray concrete. It has a sort of bluish tint to it. It's about the size of your fist. and as you look at the surface of it, you'll see strange lines that go up and down the building. Those are the seams of the mold that we made. That particular model showed us that the building could have more texture than we previously thought. And you'll see the surface is all rough and wrinkly and crinkly. And you'll think oh that's just kind of bad craftsmanship. And in fact it was but all those crinkles allowed us to see more carefully the ripples that slowly emerged into the design we have today.

Kaufman: We even kept the mold from that model. It's funny sometimes to look at these models and then try to describe all of the decisions that went into them. Because actually there's a lot that doesn't have a justification. It just is.

Go

When you're ready to leave this trail of ideas behind, let's go back to the elevators we just came from and we'll be taking the stairs across from them.

We're going to see another, very different kind of challenge Snohetta faced when they designed this chunk of building.

Stairway to floor 4

So take the stairs right here (or the elevator) to the fourth floor.

While we go, let's review. The purpose of this building is to bridge people and art. To do that, its designers wanted to make people feel welcome, and comfortable and energetic. And to make the building feel a part of the world around it, not cut off. Now for the next challenge: we're in earthquake country.

Big window on 4

Stop here at this big window for a moment. So this window and everything around us here - this is all part of a new addition. Remember? A new addition that's twice as big as the original building, but still an addition. And adding onto another building in California where, every once in awhile, the ground starts shifting back and forth beneath our feet -- that's tricky.

Go

And I get to show you part of how they do it. So turn your back to the window now. I want you to walk away from it, with the bank of elevators on your right. Pass all three elevators and stop at the next piece of wall you see to your right.

Seismic gap

You're looking for the only wall with little inset windows. SFMOMA put them there so you could view the exact spot where the new building meets the old.

Ruth Berson: *It gives you a sense of what it takes to build an addition to an older building.*

That's SFMOMA's Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs - Ruth Berson.

Berson: *Any time you can raise your skirt and show a little ankle it's a good thing.*

It's dim in there, but see on the left side of the gap, the brick facade of the original building? For twenty years that brick was exposed to San Francisco's endless cycle of sun and wind and fog. And to the right of it, just a few feet away - that's the start of the new expansion. You can actually stand here with one foot in the old building and one in the new. That gap between them is called the 'seismic gap.'

Berson: *If we ever have seismic activity, both of the buildings need to move past one another independently.*

Without that gap, they might take each other down.

Berson: *It's kind of creepy actually!*

But it's also reassuring to see this building inside out.

Berson: *Everybody wants to go see the star in her dressing room, right? You want to see how the make-up is applied and how is her hair done and all of that. Museums want to present a very finished face to the world. And the extent to which you can lay bare what your process is is a great thing.*

Go

Ok now, step back into the new building. It's where your right foot is, if you're still facing the gap. Walk with me back toward that wonderful, square window, and then we'll turn right. We are going to look at what SFMOMA has done with its art.

Right at window

At the window, turn right and walk down this long hall along the edge of the building. So this gallery with the windows is designed to be open. To let life outside the museum in. But now, take a right into the first entryway we come to.

Internal galleries

Find an out of the way corner where you can take in the room and the people in it.

Here is the internal space - the place for just you and the art, where the rest of the world can melt away a bit.

Dykers: People love daylight, and they love views, and fine art works dislike daylight and don't care about the views.

Some works of art just want to be alone with you.

Maybe make your way into the gallery next to us. It's the one just on the other side of the Brice Marden painting. That one with two panels, green and slate gray. You can try to lose yourself in his squiggly lines in the room on that other side of that wall.

Brice Marden: I keep thinking about it all the time, keep thinking about how to look at paintings-- I mean the whole why of the whole damn thing.

Artist Brice Marden says abstract painting can take you on a ride.

Marden: It can take you to more complicated places. They're not involved with a narrative, they're not telling you so much what to do.

He says sometimes he'll look at his own work and think:

Marden: I want this painting to be able to take me to something like paradise. And I mean you know, that's what the arts do. Call it what you want. I like the idea of paradise.

Look at the other visitors while you wander. The designers say it's a good sign if you see any of the following:

MONTAGE:

*If you see people touching each other, holding hands,
It's kind of cheesy to say but people pointing looking and gathering around.
A sense of wonder
you want the jaw to drop
How wide their eyes might open
Smiling
Surprise*

*Squinting your eyes
Soaking in that moment really
Stop and not say a word.*

It's not just moving from room to room; you're actually moving from wildly different ways of seeing the world.

If you think about that idea, that the museum is building a bridge between you and the art, here we are, at one end of it. We've crossed over and left the external world behind, at least a little.

At the same time, it's quite easy to cross back over that bridge, back to quote unquote real life. And that, too, is by design. We're not stuck.

Go

So let's feel what it's like to move back into the gallery with the windows - the one that runs all along the length of the building. Just find the nearest opening back onto the long gallery with the views of the city.

Long gallery with windows

Out here, you might sit on a window bench. And maybe look out at all the geometric roof patterns and how maybe they echo what you've been looking at. Or just look up at the sky. Talk with someone. Hell, post something on Instagram if you want! The building's architects think of this room as a palate cleanser. You come here because you want something different.

Dykers: Change, yes. The only thing that we absolutely know as a certainty in life.

Come away from the window so you can look at how the outside wall is curved how it bulges out toward the middle of the building and then arcs inward toward the edges? Craig hopes the curve of this outside wall actually discourages anyone from hanging art on it.

Do you breathe differently here? Are you holding your body differently?

Here's some of what the architects hope you see:

I see people chilling

Stretching out.

Using that space as part of their everyday life.

You can loosen up your tie. You can unbutton your coat.

You might see your friend.

Get very boisterous.

They never get tired. They can go on forever.

Before we move to the next floor, I want you to leave San Francisco behind once more and go see what I think of as the most internal space in this building.

Go

Walk to the farthest end of this oblong gallery - farthest from the elevators.

We're going to a chapel of sorts, for the serenely meticulous paintings of Agnes Martin. Come!

Far end of long gallery with windows

When you reach the end here, you'll turn right into the galleries, but then left again immediately, to wander through these geometric meditations on shape and color by Ellsworth Kelly.

Stick to the left, that exterior wall, all the way to the end of the building, where the curve reaches the corner. And when you can't go any further, you'll find an entrance to a room with eight sides.

Gallery of Agnes Martin paintings

Agnes Martin said, "I paint with my back to the world."

Take a look from the center of the room. And then get as close to her canvases and steady brushstrokes as you're allowed. Just rest with her work.

One of the things I love in these galleries - is that the light of San Francisco - that often foggy, wet light you can sometimes find pouring into the windows of the long narrow gallery we just came from - they've brought a little bit of it in here. Look up at the ceiling.

Dykers: It's as if that natural daylight is coming from the windows and actually penetrating into the gallery, but it's not. [laughs] It's an illusion allowing you to feel the sense of warmth that sunlight brings to you.

As we leave this chapel - don't do it just yet - I want to show you a secret spot. A spot where, if I were actually here with you: I might go "ah!" and grab you to show you what I see.

So start to walk out of the room but don't turn left - instead squeeze into the space on your right and, with your back to that little piece of wall, look up.

Up to the skylight just outside the chapel.

Sometimes when it's too bright they cover it up to protect the art, so sorry about that. But if it is open: Can you see the tip of an art deco tower? We'll see more of it later. It's the wonderful old Pacific Telephone building, designed almost a century ago by one of the great architects of his time: Timothy Pflueger. Look how it's peeking in on our museum, and the museum is inviting it to join.

Dykers: In a great building there are many surprises!

Beautiful serendipity.

Go

Ok, come. We're going back, once again, to the palate cleanser gallery - with the windows and the benches and the sculptures. Weave your way out of the interior galleries, sticking to your right, and head back along the outside wall until you find a staircase.

Back towards the elevators, through the long gallery with windows

So back through this long gallery.

If you can walk up one more staircase, definitely walk with me. If not, just take a look before you go find the elevators at the other end of the room and go up one floor.

See the staircase ahead? Stop when you get to the bottom.

Stairs to floor 5

Ok so wait here at the foot of the stairs for a second - out of the way, of course - but just take a look at these slightly askew steps that narrow towards the top.

The architects of this building walked all over our steep city while they were thinking about what to build. And among the mental images they brought home to New York, to their flat metropolis were steps: the many secret stairways that wind up and down San Francisco's hills.

Make sure you're not blocking people and take a look at your phone to see the Filbert Steps.

Go

Ok, look up now. Let's go up these steps, if you're able. Or you'll press floor 5 in the elevator.

Walking up these steps feels quite similar to climbing up this city's hills.

Aaron Dorf: *Yeah I mean it's, it's probably all in the DNA.*

That's another one of the architects, Aaron Dorf.

Dorf: *You know the slope of the streets, it's the, you know, the sidewalks that have stairs in them. It's all the hidden moments in all the alleys and passageways.*

Dykers: *We remembered what it was like to lose our breath and actually enjoy the fact that we were able to lose our breath a little bit.*

Look behind you - carefully - and you'll catch a glimpse of the climb up to the next floor.

Dorf: *The stairs are made to kind of see the next one from the one that you're on. And you have all these really unusual views.*

Like what you see outside when, at the top of the stairs, you stop and take a look out the big window.

Big window on floor 5

If you're feeling winded, welcome to the city of San Francisco. Out the window, and over to the left, there's a covered bridge that takes you to a roof garden borrowed from a neighboring parking lot. It's almost like these buildings are our hills, the streets below are the valleys. And there are secret gardens and stairways running throughout.

Go

Before we head up to the 7th floor for our final stop, there's a painting I want to show you because it also help inspire some of this building's design. It's by a California artist whose work I love - Wayne Thiebaud.

So you're going to head down this long skinny gallery. Take your time if you need to! But as soon as you reach a door into the cozy interior galleries on your right, walk through it.

Enter the internal galleries

So walk right into this room *full* of Warhols. But don't stay here. You're going to make something like a U-turn into the gallery to your left, as soon as you have the option.

Wayne Thiebaud, "Valley Streets," 2003

Now scan the walls in here for a stark city scape of many colors. Look for a wide, gray-blue street rushing downhill almost like a waterfall. Find it?

It's called "Valley Streets." Wayne Thiebaud says that after so many decades of painting this place, he still struggles to show - on a canvas - the way he sees the world.

Wayne Thiebaud: *It ain't natural to make 3 dimensions on a 2-dimensional surface. It's uh, it's strange but wonderful.*

Dykers: *The street is almost like a wall. It's vertical, it...nothing makes sense. That kind of crazy moment of unwieldy perspective was something we also wanted to bring into the design.*

It's not comfortable - just like those first awkwardly angled steps we climbed. And, he hopes, it keeps us ready for a challenge.

Go

All right, let's head to our last stop. We'll take the elevator this time - two floors up.

To get to the elevators, weave your way back to the long skinny gallery with the windows. You can go through either of the galleries next to you - either side. Just look for a red exit sign above a door and follow it out to that curved wall.

Gallery with windows

Go left towards the elevators and to the 7th floor.

There's actually a secret about SFMOMA's elevators: they can speak to you. I'm going to make it happen for you when we get there. And any time you want to experience it on your next elevator ride, just go to the 'Nearby' screen on your phone or your phone like thing while you're waiting.

Go

Ok, so I'll meet you in the 7th floor lobby.

Elevator to floor 7

[Excerpt of elevator audio, commissioned by SFMOMA + Third Coast International Audio Festival]

Elevator soundscape

[Excerpt of elevator audio, commissioned by SFMOMA + Third Coast International Audio Festival]

Floor 7

Phew! Alright! You good? You've done it. You've made it to the top of this hill.

Go

With your back to the elevators, turn left and find a door onto a balcony. Step through it.

Balcony on floor 7

I like to think of this as climbing onto a shelf on the side of a cliff. And look across the valley - there's the old Pacific Telephone building - the art deco peak with eagles perched on top opposite us. Sometimes the staff here sees hawks flying around!

The US Weather Bureau used to fly a 25 foot long triangular red flag on top of the Pacific Telephone Building. It was to warn sailors if a storm was coming. And at night, they would flash a red light.

Now keep moving down to the end of this balcony.

San Francisco is a port town.

Sure, most of the container ships that come in and out everyday dock across the Bay in Oakland now. But this City is still deeply linked to its water. And the designers of this building very much wanted to reflect that.

There's one spot, most of the way down, where you can see a sliver of water and a tower of the Bay Bridge. Some days you can feel the water in the air. That's the final so-called 'condition' of San Francisco I want you to experience here: The sea and its neighboring bay. Is it foggy? Is the air here moist?

If you haven't already, go ahead and walk all the way over to the far end of the balcony. Up to where you see a glass gate, which you're not supposed to go through.

It's a cool spot because the window there looks onto the rooms where SFMOMA's conservators clean and repair artworks. Hopefully you'll get a glimpse of some work in progress. This is another way SFMOMA invites you into the star's dressing room.

But the last thing I want to show you from here is the building's facade. And I think right here, at the end of this balcony, is the best place to see it. So turn around and look at our building. Look at its skin. And finally, you can actually touch something!

The facade is wavy. And the slightest bit sparkly.

There are tiny, bits of reflective rock inside these wavy panels, capturing the light, maybe making it glitter - hopefully in that same way the harbor does. Can you feel the grit? And just like the Bay or the Ocean, there's no consistent pattern in this facade. Each piece, each panel, is custom made by a Bay Area company. And each a little different from the next.

The architects of this building talk often about bodies in space. Craig Dykers will say, "you might not think about it but your body will know it." When you leave here, Craig hopes very much that your body carries something with it.

Dykers: If it's a good building, it will engender a memory more than it will engender an image. A building is not about its physical qualities alone; it's about the things that you carry with you.

One lasting piece of the bridge between you and the art inside.

I hope you have a wonderful rest of your visit here. I'm Avery Trufelman, from *99% Invisible*.