

Desert museum is a living example of sustainability

Water + Life Museum, Hemet, California



Visitors to the Water + Life Museum in Hemet, California may not be aware that it is the first museum in the nation to earn a LEED[®] Platinum designation by the U.S. Green Building Council. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is the internationally-recognized benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings, so the achievement is quite significant.

This dazzling \$40 million campus, which includes the Center for Water Education and the Western Center for Archaeology and Paleontology, covers 17 acres beneath the dams of Diamond Valley Lake, a large man-made reservoir.

Products in use

- Rockfon[®] Planostile[™] Snap-in
- Chicago Metallic[®] 1200 Seismic

Rockfon Planostile metal panel ceiling system allows for visual continuity from exterior to interior

Designed by Lehrer + Gangi Design + Build Architects, the five steel-clad towers of the twin museums form an elongated front façade against a dramatic desert skyline. A living example of sustainability, the facility contains museum exhibit space, laboratories, classrooms, administrative offices, support facilities, gift shops, a café, an interior plaza and interpretive landscaping.

The museum takes great pride in promoting the facility's environmental features such as one of the nation's largest

rooftop photovoltaic installations, state-of-the-art irrigation systems using reclaimed water, and a sophisticated mechanical system of radiant heating and cooling.

From a design standpoint, the project owners – Metropolitan Water District and the Western Center for Archaeology & Paleontology – set their sights on “a clean, modern look,” said Anne Marie Kaufman Perlov, Gangi project architect for the Water + Life Museum.

“We had to ensure that the ceilings were aligned and installed properly outside in a high desert, windy climate.”



Rockfon Planostile delivers visual continuity

This vision is readily apparent in the museum’s airy floor plan and endless windows, and extends upward to the ceiling design. “We chose [Rockfon’s] Snap-in Planostile ceiling system for its materiality, as we needed a suspended ceiling to cover the mechanical systems such as duct work and pipes,” said Perlov. The Rockfon Planostile panels and Chicago Metallic 1200 Seismic suspension system were installed in the museum’s main exhibit areas, as well as in the labs and administrative offices.

The snap-in feature of the Rockfon Planostile allows for visual continuity from exterior to interior, described as a “seamless look” by Perlov, in keeping with the overall museum design.

“We had to ensure that the ceilings were aligned and installed properly outside in a high desert, windy climate,” says Perlov. Rockfon Planostile Snap-in ceiling panels can withstand positive and negative wind load pressure UL580 assembly. This fact made them the ideal candidate for this project.

John Autry, the ceiling installation contractor and project manager for Orange County Plastering, says that the pattern layout was very crucial to the building’s appearance. “All of the ceiling panels were cut on-site. It was challenging because they are thin and we had to be very diligent to ensure that the look was just right.” says Autry. The end result was the “seamless look” the designers had envisioned, broken only by the floor-to-ceiling window walls.

Autry worked closely with Rockfon’s Technical Services team who offered problem-solving support to the installers in the field. “[Rockfon] didn’t manufacture any panels until everyone agreed on the colors and suitability of the system design,” said Autry. “The company was very responsive to all our needs which is why we ended up with a beautiful finished product.”



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Ceiling system contributed to LEED points

Rockfon Planostile acoustical metal panel is available with lay-in or snap-in panels and is designed to integrate with a variety of suspension systems. It's offered in standard and custom perforation patterns.

Rockfon was able to provide the custom perforation pattern that Autry was looking for. Availability, affordability and the company's ability to meet aggressive deadlines made Autry decide to spec and install the Rockfon Planostile Snap-in panels at the museum.

Both the Rockfon Planostile ceiling product and the Chicago Metallic 1200 Seismic suspension system are sustainable and contributed to the LEED points accumulated by the building. The steel has minimum 25% post consumer recycled content while the aluminum offers 100% post consumer recycled content.

Perlov's first-time experience with the Rockfon Planostile Snap-in panels was a positive one. "I would certainly spec it again," she said. "The panels look beautiful."



"The company was very responsive to all our needs which is why we ended up with a beautiful finished product."

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