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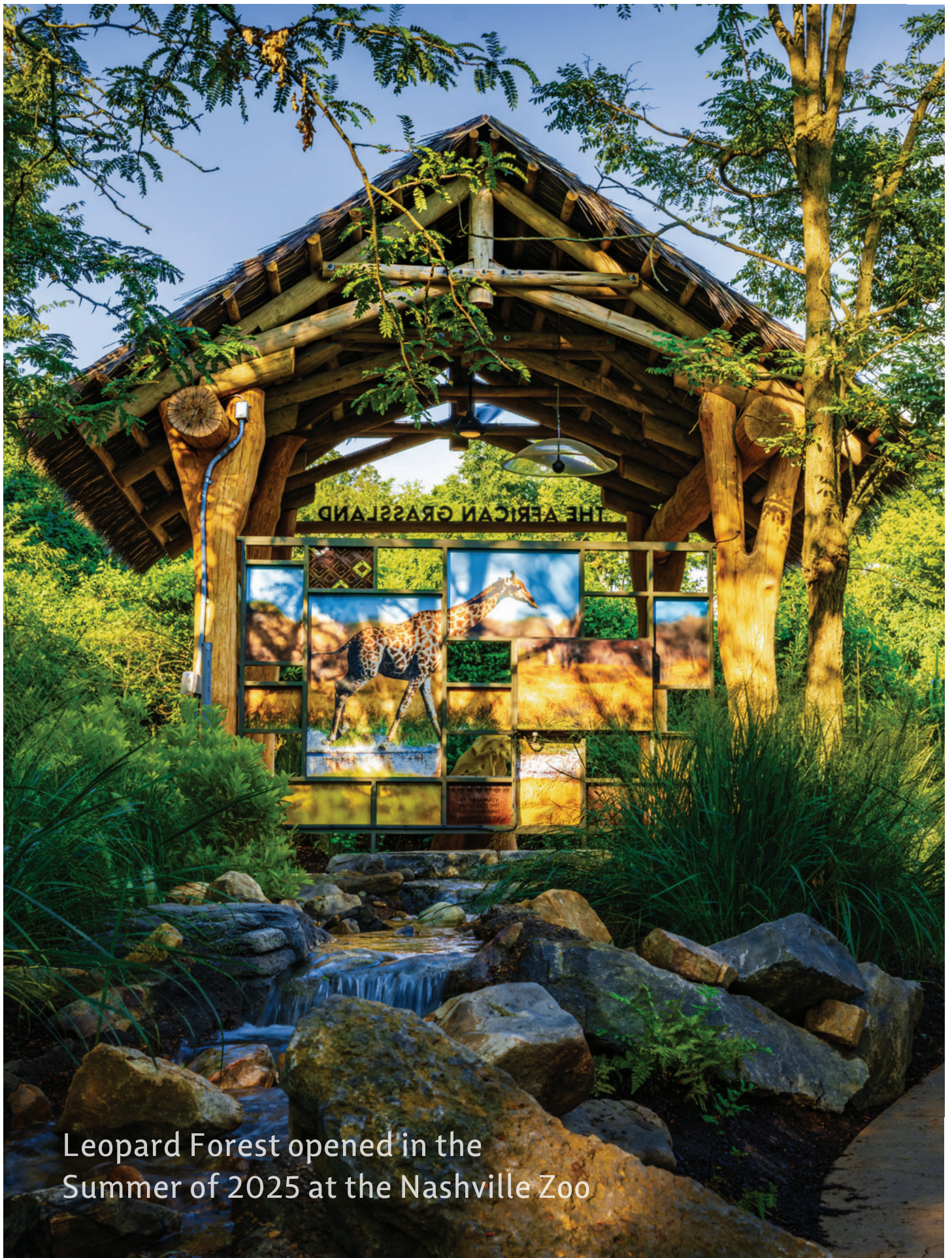
communications design

branding | marketing | exhibits | multimedia | environmental

LEOPARD FOREST
NASHVILLE ZOO

CASE STUDY





Leopard Forest opened in the
Summer of 2025 at the Nashville Zoo



FINAL INSTALLATION

The exhibit included 4 all new interpretive stations, with beautiful graphics, compelling videos, and inviting tactile & interactive elements.



These interpretive stations served as the main content hubs for both the *Leopard Forest* exhibit and larger *Africa: Living in Balance* exhibit. They provided centralized locations for communicating the big idea of the exhibit — that the needs of both people and wildlife must be met for all species to thrive.





Three of the stations featured interactive tables that helped visitors explore primate sounds, rhino horns, leopard patterns, and more.





The beautiful exhibit is the end result of a comprehensive development and design process that spanned well over a year.

EXHIBIT MAIN MESSAGE

The awe-inspiring land, amazing species, and remarkable people throughout Africa are intertwined; only by living in balance can all thrive.



Nashville Zoo at Grassmere Africa in Balance Exhibit

Exhibit Brief | Theme Statements | Interpretive Plan Draft Date: August 28, 2023 | Gecko Group

This document represents the first phase of our interpretive design process and includes the exhibit brief, main message, and exhibit themes.

The overall purpose of the exhibit brief is to document the

- 1) project statement of purpose,
- 2) characterization of audience, and
- 3) general approach and intended outcomes. The Exhibit Brief will clarify the underpinnings that will guide the rest of the exhibit process.

The main message is a single, clear sentence that captures the "main message" that the exhibit should communicate to all visitors. This main message will be the shaping force and selective filter that will guide the development of exhibit themes and subsequent deliverables. This can also be called the central theme.

The exhibit subthemes are a short outline of several key themes that will recur throughout the exhibit. These may become specific exhibit components or may simply reflect a guiding perspective throughout the development process.

Sign off on these ensures that we are all on the same page and ready to move ahead with shared assumptions to further development of storyline, content, and interpretive planning.

1



Global Landscapes Forum (GLF)
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"Restoration can only succeed by involving communities & giving them the chance to use their traditional [#knowledge](#)."—Daniel Kobaj, Founder of the Ogiek Peoples' Development Program. More from [#glfNairobi2018](#) [ow.ly/Mivs50kiEwM](#)



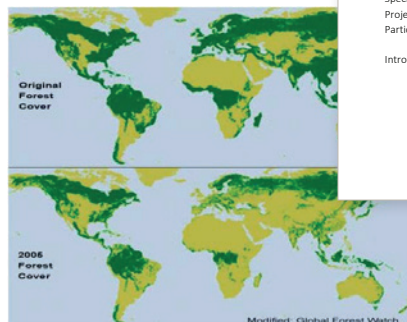
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THE PROCESS BEGINS

We start development with information gathering, stakeholder engagements, and a lot of research. This helps us create our foundational elements: visitor outcomes, experience goals, and perhaps most importantly, the Main Message.



Conservationists have been working diligently on a recovery program for the Southern White Rhinoceros that has seen this population grow from less than 50 rhinoceros in the early 1900s to around 18,000. Unfortunately, poaching has reduced these numbers by 15% from 2012 to 2017 since the value of their horns has increased on the black market. They are easy targets in open habitats, even in protected areas like Africa's Kruger National Park. The Nashville Zoo actively supports White Rhinoceros conservation by establishing guard posts, developing rapid response teams, and supporting intelligence networks. The new guard posts and housing for the ranger staff have made significant progress in specific critical areas. To better assist these staff members, new digital radios have been purchased to enhance the deployment of those units.

Species: Southern White Rhinoceros, *Ceratotherium s. simum*, (IUCN: Near Threatened, CITES I)
Project Location: South Africa
Participating Institutions: N/A

Intro Text

Heading: Africa in Balance

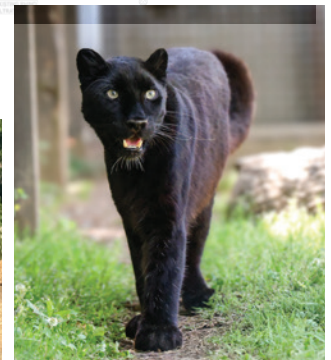
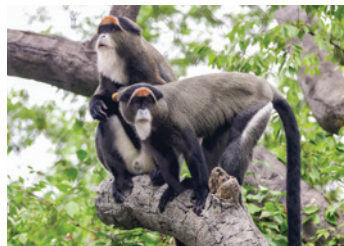
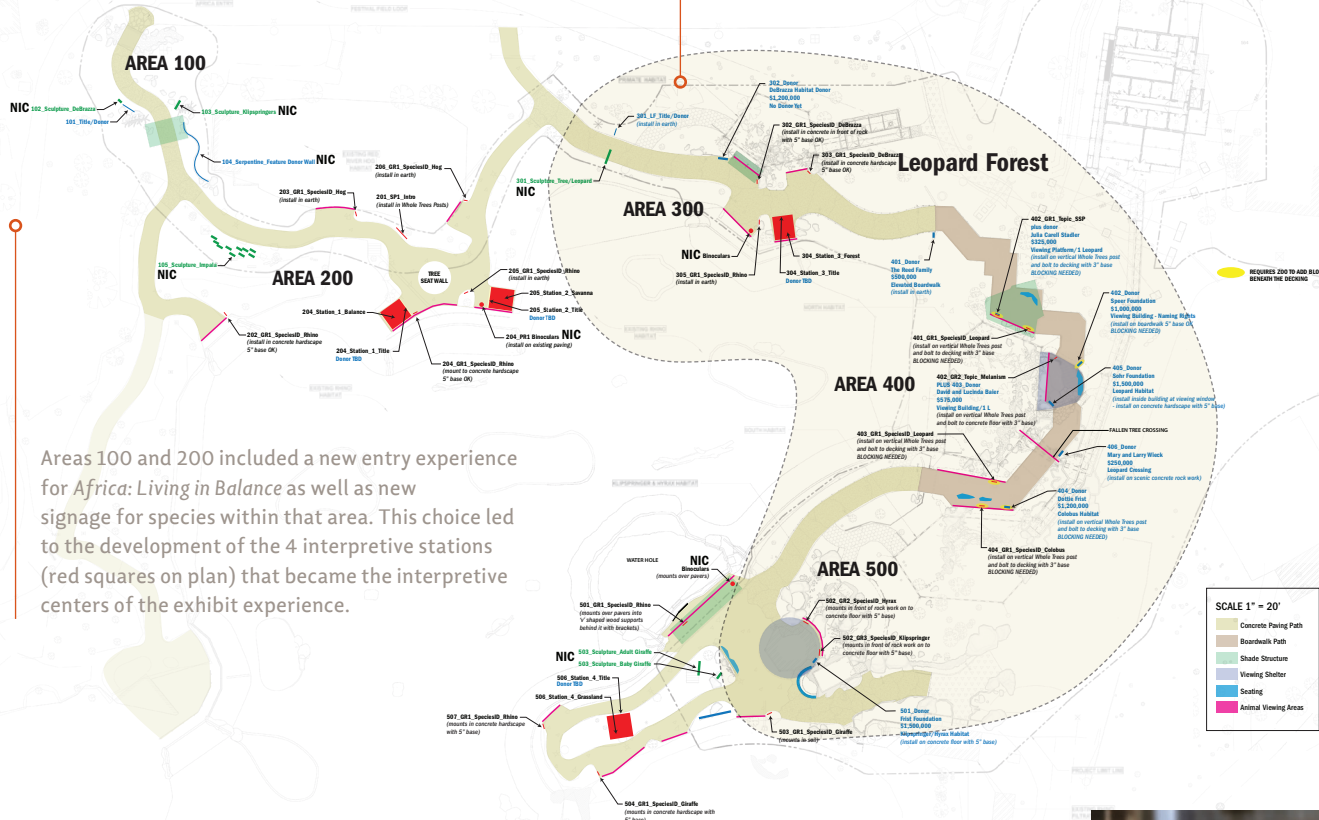
Body Copy: Africa is a diverse continent made up of awe-inspiring lands, amazing species, and remarkable people with rich cultures. As humans needs grow, we expand into new places. Often, these places were home to wildlife. To ensure the beauty of Africa's varied landscapes survives, we must meet the needs of all living things, not just our own.



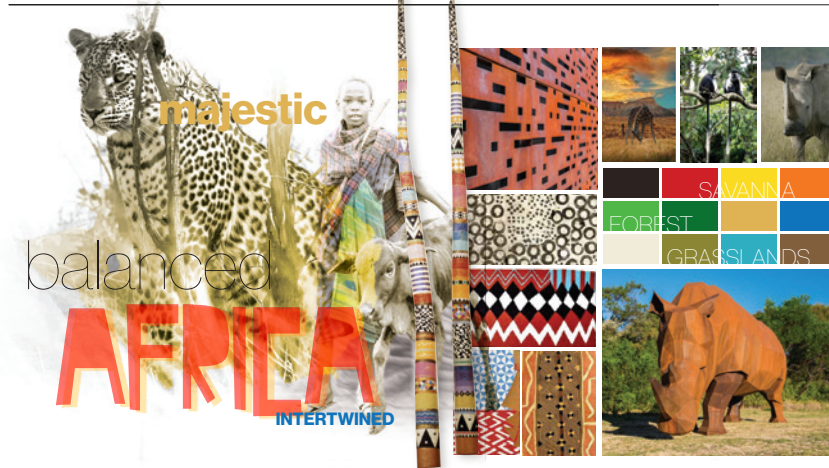
A unique challenge for this exhibit was its placement within a larger existing exhibit.

While the original scope of work was isolated to the newly built spaces (within the yellow circle here), we felt strongly that creating a cohesive experience across the entire area would be more beneficial to the visitor experience and telling a more comprehensive story.

Site Location Plan



Mood



NASHVILLE ZOO | Leopard Forest Exhibit

geckogroup

date: March 1, 2023

version: 2/2023/03

4

CONCEPT DESIGN

Our creative team works together to begin defining the look of the exhibits, pulling together mood boards, providing inspiration imagery, and creating a style guide.

Interpretation



TYPE

ACIER BAT - VARYING STYLES - HEADLINES AND CALLOUTS

AFRICA IN BALANCE
AFRICA IN BALANCE
AFRICA IN BALANCE
AFRICA IN BALANCE

NEUE HAAS GROSCHENK - VARYING WEIGHTS - SUBHEADS, BODY COPY AND CAPTIONS

Africa in Balance
Africa in Balance
Africa in Balance
Africa in Balance

TYPE TREATMENTS - Layered font styles and color shifts

AFRICA
AFRICA

COLOR PALETTE



MATERIAL

WEATHERED CORTEN STEEL, SCULPTURES AND PIERCED PANELS, CERAMIC TEXTURED TILES, PAINTED METAL, WHOLE TREES POSTS WITH THATCHED ROOF, DIRECT EMBED GRAPHICS



ZOO LOGOS



NASHVILLE ZOO | Leopard Forest Exhibit Interpretive Graphics

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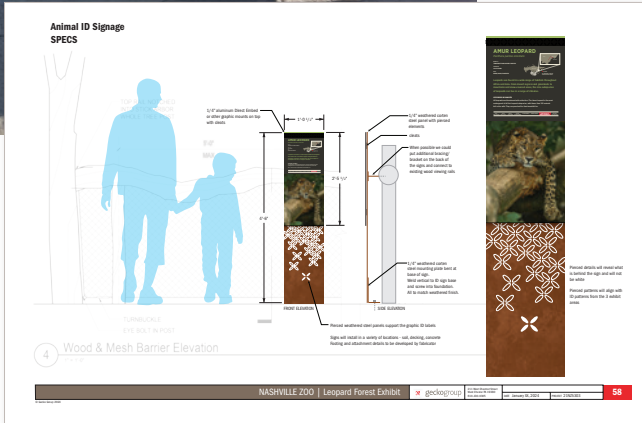
date: MARCH 4, 2024

version: 2/2023/03

1

This area overlooking the rhino enclosure provided a great place for spotting scopes, enabling visitors to zoom in on these remarkable animals.





SCHEMATIC DEVELOPMENT

Visualizing key elements is critical to ensure all stakeholders are on board and in agreement on design approach. To achieve this, we create detailed renderings and full-size mock-ups and printouts.



1 Elevation - Left Wall
Scale: 1/2" = 1'-0"



2 Elevation - Tent 3 - Front - Rear Wall
Scale: 1/2" = 1'-0"

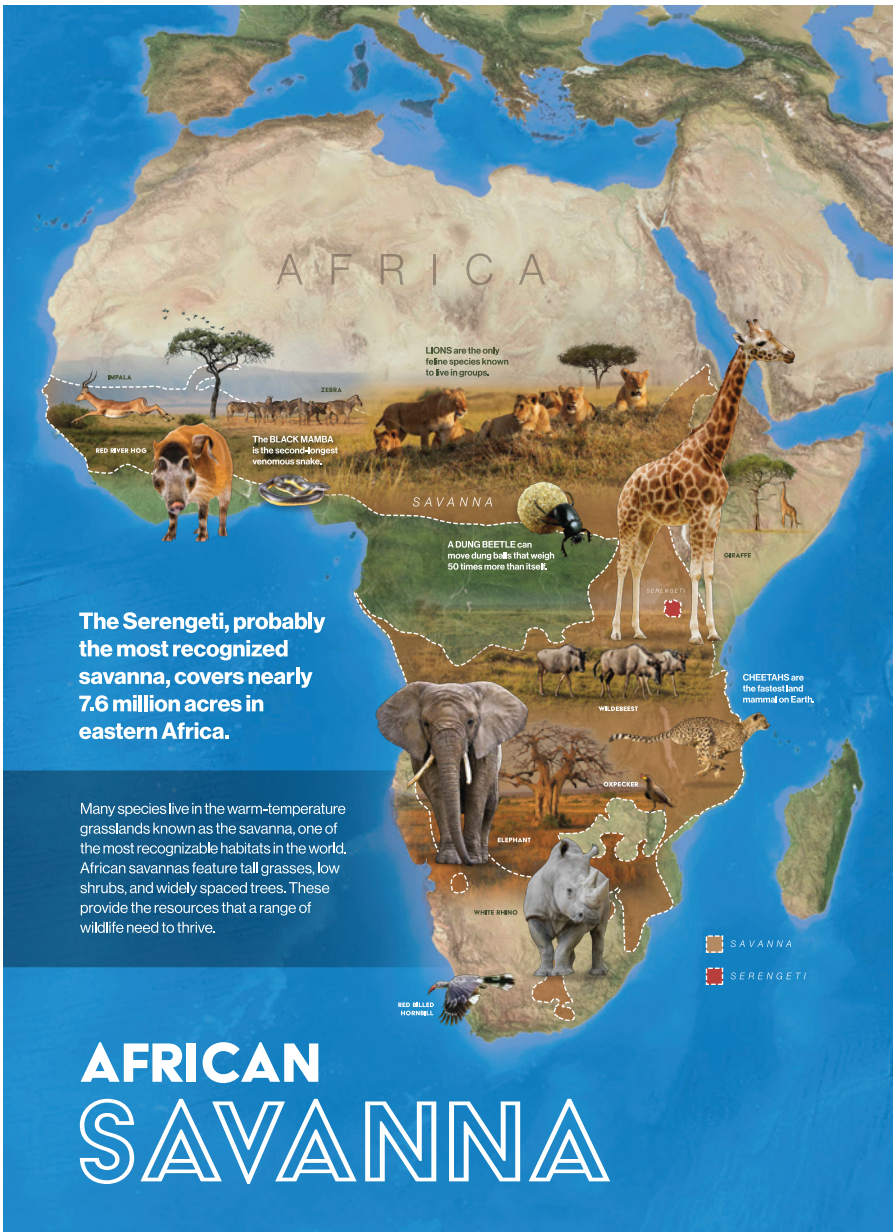


4 Elevation - Right Wall
Scale: 1/2" = 1'-0"

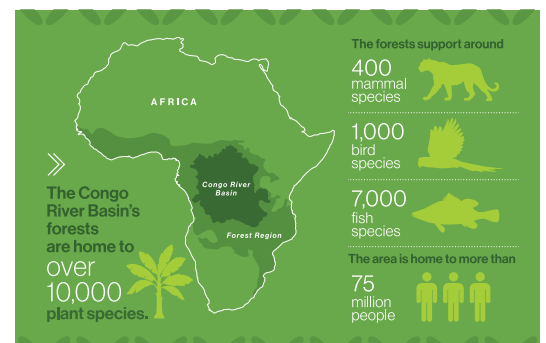
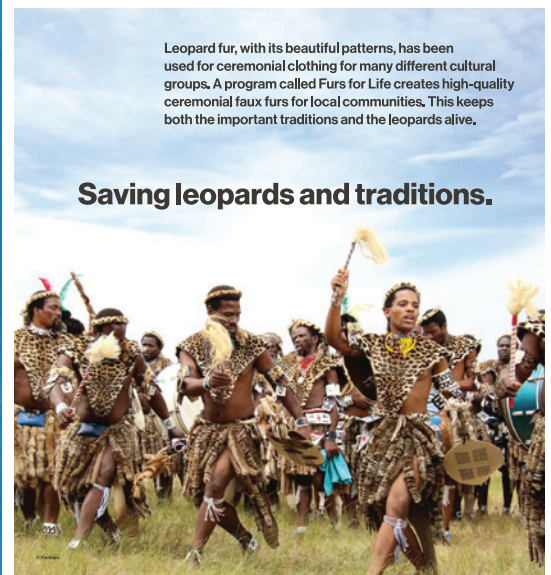
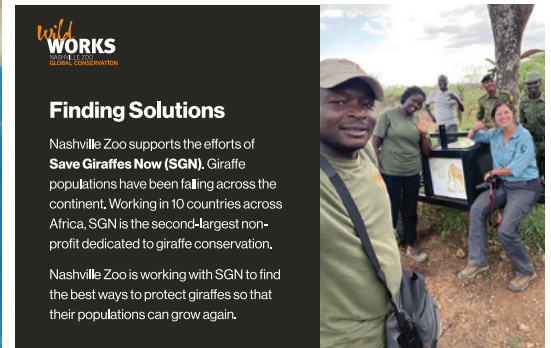
DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

We work closely with fabricators to ensure all elements meet everyone's expectations. During Design Development, we create extremely detailed plans that show every element from every angle. We also define materials and finishes.





Design Development is also when the copy created first in Word documents begin to come to life in stunning graphic panels, infographics, and sometimes even media pieces.





WildWorks
NASHVILLE ZOO
GLOBAL CONSERVATION

Nashville Zoo's WildWorks Programs aren't limited to those in Africa.

The Zoo spearheads many programs in the United States, in Tennessee, in Nashville, and around the globe. These efforts help us live in balance with our wild neighbors.

YOUR VISIT TO THE ZOO TODAY helps support our conservation work.

NASHVILLE ZOO SUPPORTS MANY CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS AROUND THE WORLD.

Here are a few found throughout Africa.

Cheetah Conservation Fund
Somali
With the help of a Nashville Zoo staff member, 38 cheetah cubs were rehabilitated. They were taken from traffickers, bound for the illegal pet trade.

Gorilla Rehabilitation and Conservation Education (GRACE)
Democratic Republic of Congo
Through a plan focused on rehabilitation, conservation, and community engagement, the Zoo has supported GRACE in their critical work with Grauer's gorillas.

International Crane Foundation
South Africa
Funding provided by Nashville Zoo has helped the Foundation create an action plan to protect the vulnerable Stanley blue crane.

International Rhino Foundation
South Africa
Support provided by the Zoo has provided valuable resources for the Foundation to continue their work protecting southern white rhinos in Kruger National Park in South Africa.

International Rhino Keeper Association
South Africa
With help from Nashville Zoo, the Association supports the training of anti-poaching rangers in South Africa.

Lewa Wildlife Conservancy
Kenya
The Zoo has provided support to the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy for their program to create a protected sanctuary for threatened species, including the mountain bongo antelope and black rhinos.

Okapi Conservation Project (OCP)
Democratic Republic of Congo
Nashville Zoo has supported the conservation, education, and community outreach initiatives of OCP and their work at the Okapi Wildlife Reserve.

Save Giraffes Now (SGN)
Throughout Africa
Expertise provided by Nashville Zoo staff has helped SGN better understand giraffe behavior, improving their relocation and monitoring programs.

VulPro
South Africa
Zoo-provided resources have provided upgraded medical facilities where VulPro cares for injured vultures with a goal to release them into the wild.

Wildlife Conservation Network
Botswana, throughout Africa
Nashville Zoo has funded the Network in their work throughout Africa, helping protect threatened species like cheetahs, giraffes, elephants, painted dogs, and more.

WildWorks
NASHVILLE ZOO
GLOBAL CONSERVATION

Nashville Zoo takes great pride in their conservation work, both onsite and in the wild. We created a branded design to highlight these conservation stories throughout the Zoo. The many Zoo-supported Africa conservation programs were featured throughout the exhibit stations.



While the larger stories were told within the interpretive stations, it was important to have species-specific information where visitors would see those species.



The design approach for the physical elements of the exhibit incorporated a mix of materials and textures to create a rich visual landscape.



We delight in seeing our designs match up seamlessly with the finished built product. Here, the entry threshold to Leopard Forest is shown in design and in final installation.

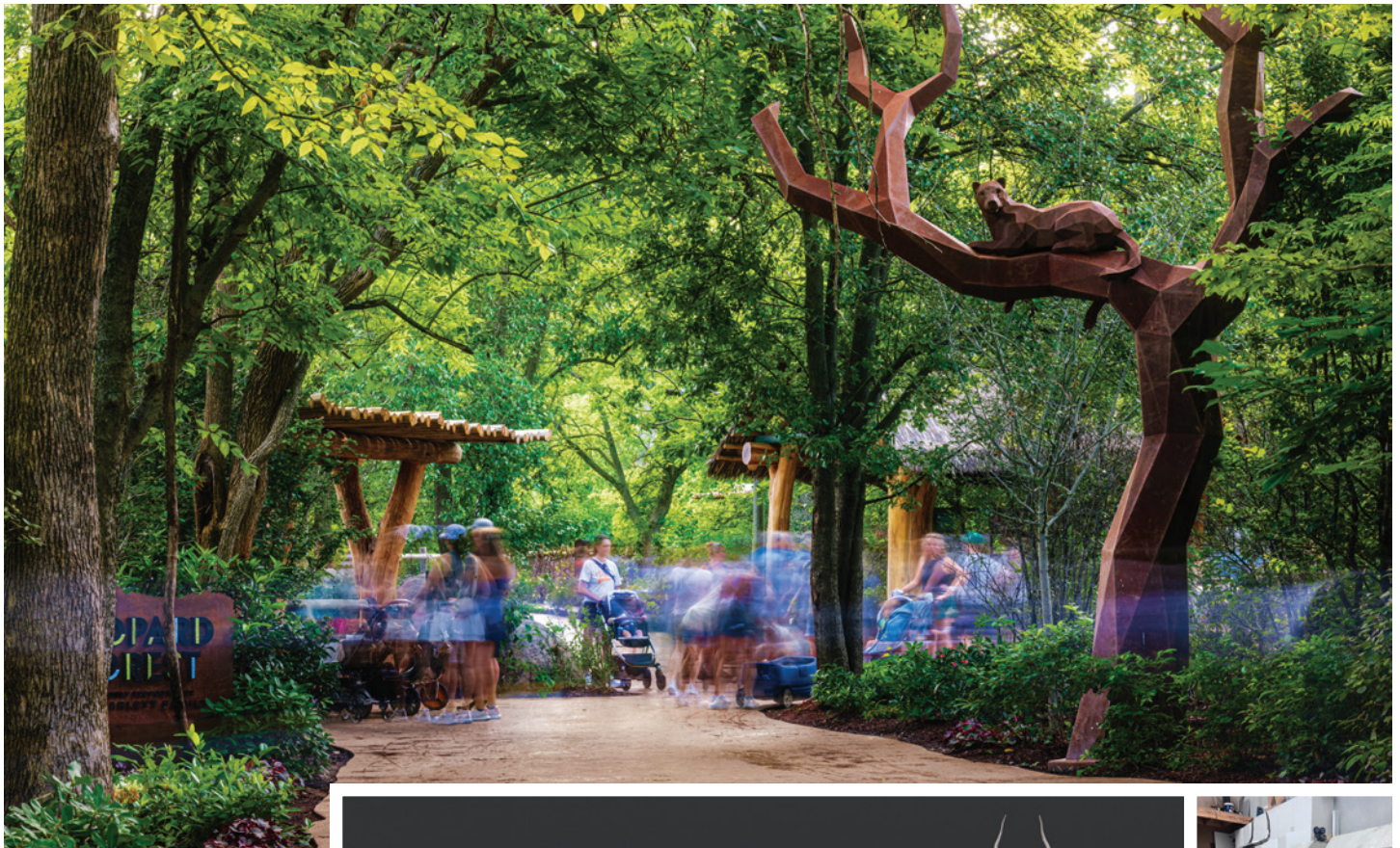




We created a donor recognition design that complemented the interpretive elements and blended wonderfully with the exhibit.



Our favorite projects are ones with productive collaborations with other creative people and firms. For this exhibit, we were able to collaborate with two remarkable artists to create stunning installations that elevate the visitor experience.



ARTISTIC FEATURE

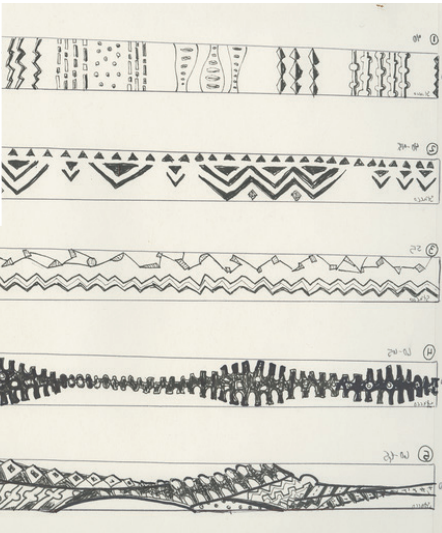
We had the pleasure of collaborating with Australian artist Matt Hill who created a whole menagerie of corten animals that would enhance the environment and delight the visitor.





ARTISTIC FEATURE

We were also fortunate to collaborate with ceramic artist Rhoda Kahler on the creation of a stunning ceramic mural wall, as well as ceramic donor recognition elements.

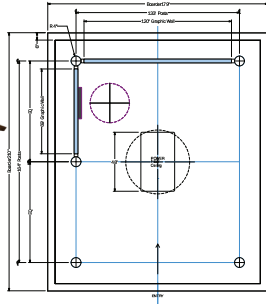




It is important for us to offer multiple gateways for visitors to connect with the content. Including hands-on, touchable elements is a great way to activate engagement and create memorable experiences.



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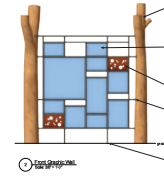
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101-0002	General Excavation	SF	100	Excavation	Excavate 100 SF of ground	Local Contractor	1 Week	\$10.00	\$1,000.00
101-0003	General Excavation	SF	100	Excavation	Excavate 100 SF of ground	Local Contractor	1 Week	\$10.00	\$1,000.00
101-0004	General Excavation	SF	100	Excavation	Excavate 100 SF of ground	Local Contractor	1 Week	\$10.00	\$1,000.00
101-0005	General Excavation	SF	100	Excavation	Excavate 100 SF of ground	Local Contractor	1 Week	\$10.00	\$1,000.00
101-0006	General Excavation	SF	100	Excavation	Excavate 100 SF of ground	Local Contractor	1 Week	\$10.00	\$1,000.00
101-0007	General Excavation	SF	100	Excavation	Excavate 100 SF of ground	Local Contractor	1 Week	\$10.00	\$1,000.00
101-0008	General Excavation	SF	100	Excavation	Excavate 100 SF of ground	Local Contractor	1 Week	\$10.00	\$1,000.00
101-0009	General Excavation	SF	100	Excavation	Excavate 100 SF of ground	Local Contractor	1 Week	\$10.00	\$1,000.00
101-0010	General Excavation	SF	100	Excavation	Excavate 100 SF of ground	Local Contractor	1 Week	\$10.00	\$1,000.00

TECHNICAL DRAWINGS AND BID DOCUMENTS

Once the design is finalized, we create technical drawings that can be used for bidding the project and communicating with the chosen fabricator. This ensures that everything can be created to match the design direction.



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Note:
Graphic panels are sized 1/16" smaller than frame opening to allow for installation and expansion/contraction.

NASHVILLE 200 | GRAPHIC WALL DETAILS

© geckgroup

1/16" graphic sized 1/16" smaller on all sides to fit into frame

1/8" graphic sized 1/16" smaller on all sides to fit into frame

1/8" graphic sized 1/16" smaller on all sides to fit into frame

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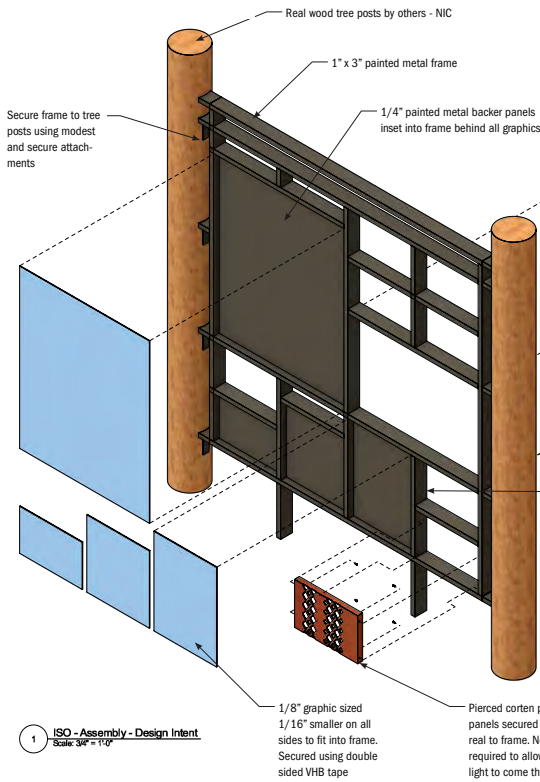
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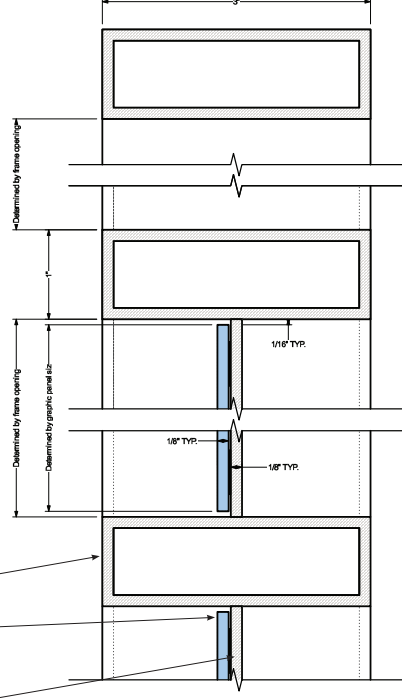
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1/8" graphic sized 1/16" smaller on all sides to fit into frame

1/8" graphic sized 1/16" smaller on all sides to fit into frame



Note:
Power / junction boxes and runs to general monitor location provided by others. Fab to coordinate with on-site location to determine final connections and fishing through frame



2 Section Scale Actual Size



We know visitors are excited to see the various animals when they come to the Zoo. Through that enthusiasm, we aim to engage visitors in learning and caring more about the species on view and their wild counterparts.

The Main Message of this exhibit centered on the idea of balance. Just as we need balance between the needs of people and the needs of animals for them to thrive, exhibits must balance the needs of visitors with the needs of the institution. The best exhibits are those that excite and engage visitors, providing answers to the questions they have about what they are seeing, and providing context for why they should care. Achieving these goals helps the Zoo fulfill its mission to not only steward the species in their care, but also educate their visitors about the importance of those species. And our roles in their survival.

A Look Inside the Process of Creating *Leopard Forest* at the Nashville Zoo

This multi-species exhibit featured brand-new exhibit spaces and species alongside revitalized and renewed exhibits.

Gecko Group's scope of services included:

*Exhibit Design, Visitor Evaluation, Interpretive Planning,
Content Development, Label Writing, Graphic Design,
Multimedia Design & Production, Bid Package Development,
Project Management & Installation Oversight,
Donor Program Design*