A Shared Leaf

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Program	Master of Architecture II
University	Harvard Graduate School of Design

Introduction

I am a Master of Architecture II candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Design and a graduate of The University of Texas at Austin. My work is interested in the relationship between structure, landscape, and public gathering, with a focus on designs that are both conceptually clear and realistically buildable. Through professional experience in Japan and the United States, I have developed an interest in how architecture can create memorable civic experiences through material, form, and atmosphere. Receiving 2nd Prize in the Museum of Outdoor Arts Design and Build Competition was a meaningful experience, and this return is approached with gratitude, a desire to continue learning, and the opportunity to introduce a new proposal more closely connected to the spirit of the Museum of Outdoor Arts as a performing space.

Aarif Ahmad

Education

The University of Texas at Austin
Bachelor of Architecture, 2020-2025

Harvard Graduate School of Design
Master of Architecture II, 2025-2027

Professional Experience

SANAA Jimusho / Kazuyo Sejima & Associates

Tokyo, Japan
Intern Architect June 2024 - November 2024

+ Managed the competition submission and presentation for an international competition in Chiba, Japan working between partners and staff members.

+ Coordinated renderings, diagrams, text, and images across a team of 10+ staff for competition submission in English and Japanese.

+ Responsible for RFP/RFQ and client information to prepare Sejima and Nishizawa for client presentation

+ Led project meetings for a competition for a cultural center in the Middle East, involving preparation of diagrams, client and program information.

+ Images, diagrams, and design options for internal and client meetings for the PowerX project in Tamano and the Setouchii Art Triennale 2025.

+ Contribution to more than 10 competitions and projects in SD and DD phase over the course of 6 months, including presentation material, diagrams, images, and drawings.

BIkube Studio

Austin, Texas
Intern Architect May 2022 - March 2024

+ Contribution of client and community engagement and design development for the Nueces Reconstruction Project.

+ Organization of presentation material for clients and interest groups, composed of plans, sections, diagrams, and site models.

+ Regular communication of design intent with the architect-of-record and local landscape architect.

+ Presented design concept to large audiences of 400+

Awards

Harvard GSD Dean's Merit Scholarship
Granted to admits with the highest projected potential in architecture.

Harvard Building Bridges Fund
Award from the Office of the President to construct a campus pavilion.

Oglesby Traveling Prize
Awarded to a graduating student in the department of architecture

James and Joane Pratt Japan Travel Scholarship
Scholarship awarded to travel and conduct research in Japan

MOA Design and Build Competition
2nd prize in a national design competition for a celestial pavilion

Never Enough Architecture Competition
8th place in an international adaptive reuse competition

VolumeZero Architecture Competition
16th Place in an international library competition

120 Hours Design Competition
Honourable mention in an international ideas competition

Activities

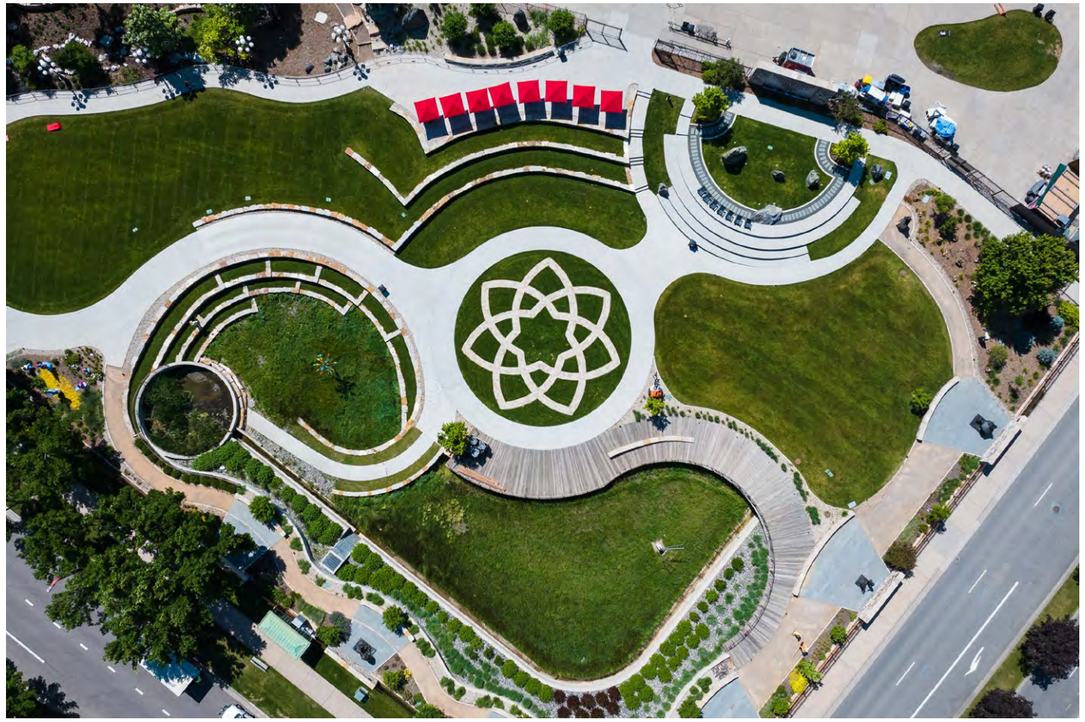
National Organization of Minority Architecture Students

Programs Director 2022 - 2023

+ Facilitated office hours between School of Architecture students and professionals in the field

+ Organized outreach between NOMAS and local office

Site Selection



Museum of Outdoor Arts, Aerial View

Go Hasegawa, “Flying Carpet”

Frei Otto, Multihalle Mannheim

Fabrication of a curved glulam member.

What about the site inspired your design?
What artistic or cultural references informed your decision?

Marjorie Park inspired the proposal through its rare combination of art, landscape, and performance within a single public setting. The site is not an empty parcel, but an active sculpture park where nature, gathering, and cultural programming already coexist. In particular, the retention landscape and open views across the park suggested an opportunity for a structure that could be present without becoming obstructive. Rather than filling the site with a heavy object, the design responds by touching the ground lightly at two points and rising into the air, preserving visual continuity while creating a clear civic destination.

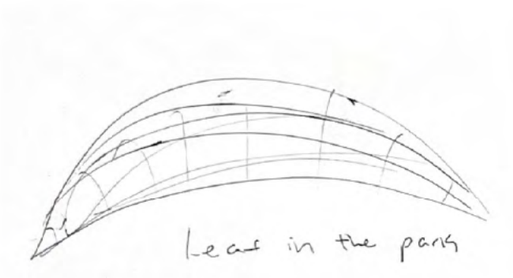
The leaf-like form emerged from observing the character of the park itself. Marjorie Park contains planted landscapes, seasonal activity, water-edge conditions, and an atmosphere that feels distinct from a conventional urban plaza. The proposal seeks to extend that identity through an architectural gesture that feels natural yet memorable, as though a large leaf has settled within the landscape and opened to receive performance. Its sweeping form frames the stage while maintaining openness to the surrounding lawns, trees, and pathways. In this way, the project aims to belong to the site rather than compete with it.

Artistically and structurally, the proposal draws inspiration from Frei Otto’s Multihalle Mannheim, where lightweight timber systems achieve expressive span with remarkable efficiency. That precedent informed the use of a curved timber lattice capable of spanning broadly while touching the site minimally. The project also references Go Hasegawa’s Flying Carpet, whose elevated path creates a gentle way of moving through nature. This idea informed the companion walkway proposed through the retention landscape, allowing visitors to experience planting, water, and changing views as part of the museum visit.

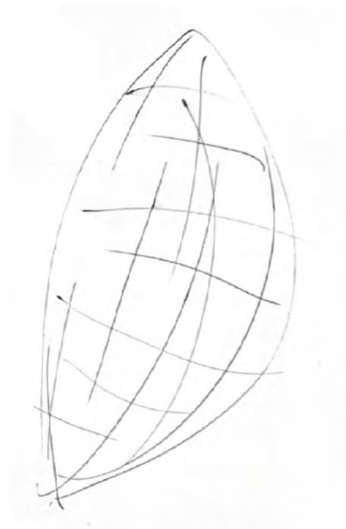
Culturally, the proposal responds to the Museum of Outdoor Arts’ long-standing mission of making art part of everyday life. The bandshell is intended to function not only during scheduled concerts or events, but also as a sculptural landmark, meeting point, and place of rest during ordinary visits. The walkway similarly transforms overlooked ground into an accessible landscape experience. Together, these elements aim to strengthen Marjorie Park as a place where art, ecology, and public life meet in a distinctly Colorado setting.

Elevation View

Elevation View



Sketch of Approach



Sketch of the plan

A leaf-like timber bandshell creates a new gathering place within Marjorie Park for performance, rest, and everyday public life.

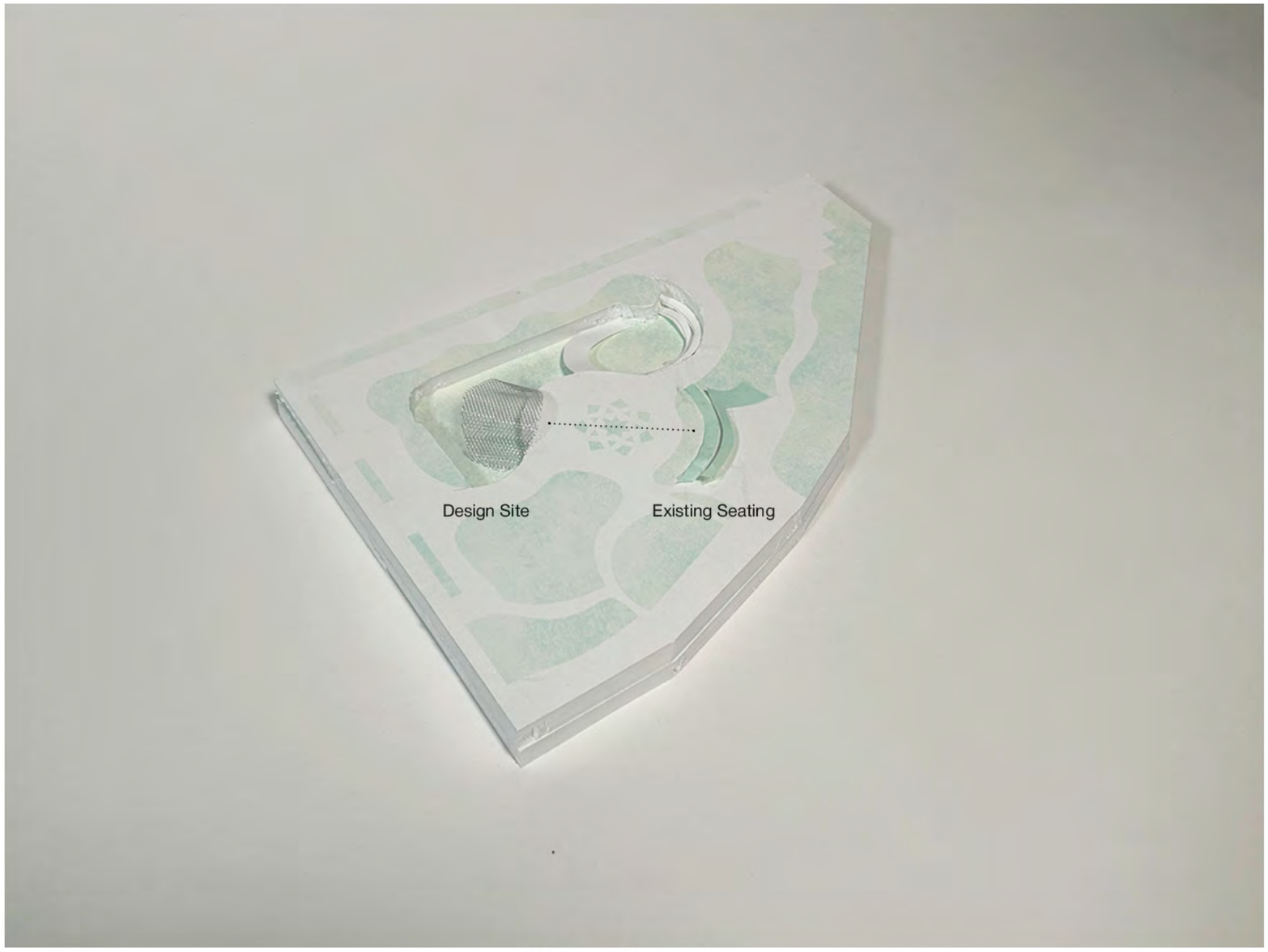
Plan + Elevation

Site Plan

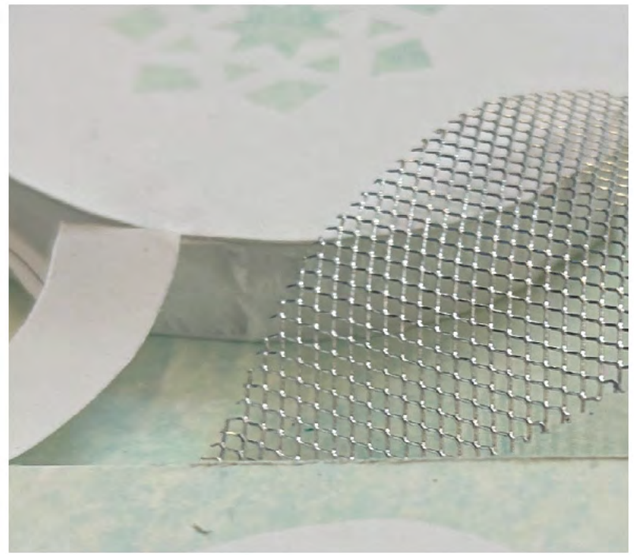
Site Elevation

The shell remains within the required footprint while preserving views through minimal two-point ground contact.

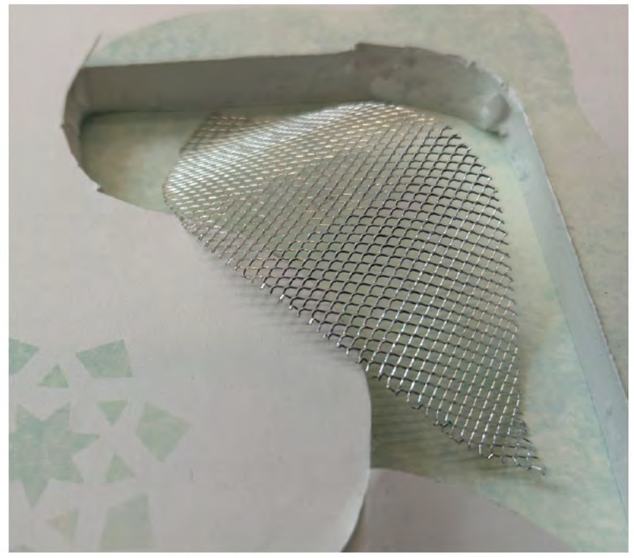
Physical Model



Site Model Photograph



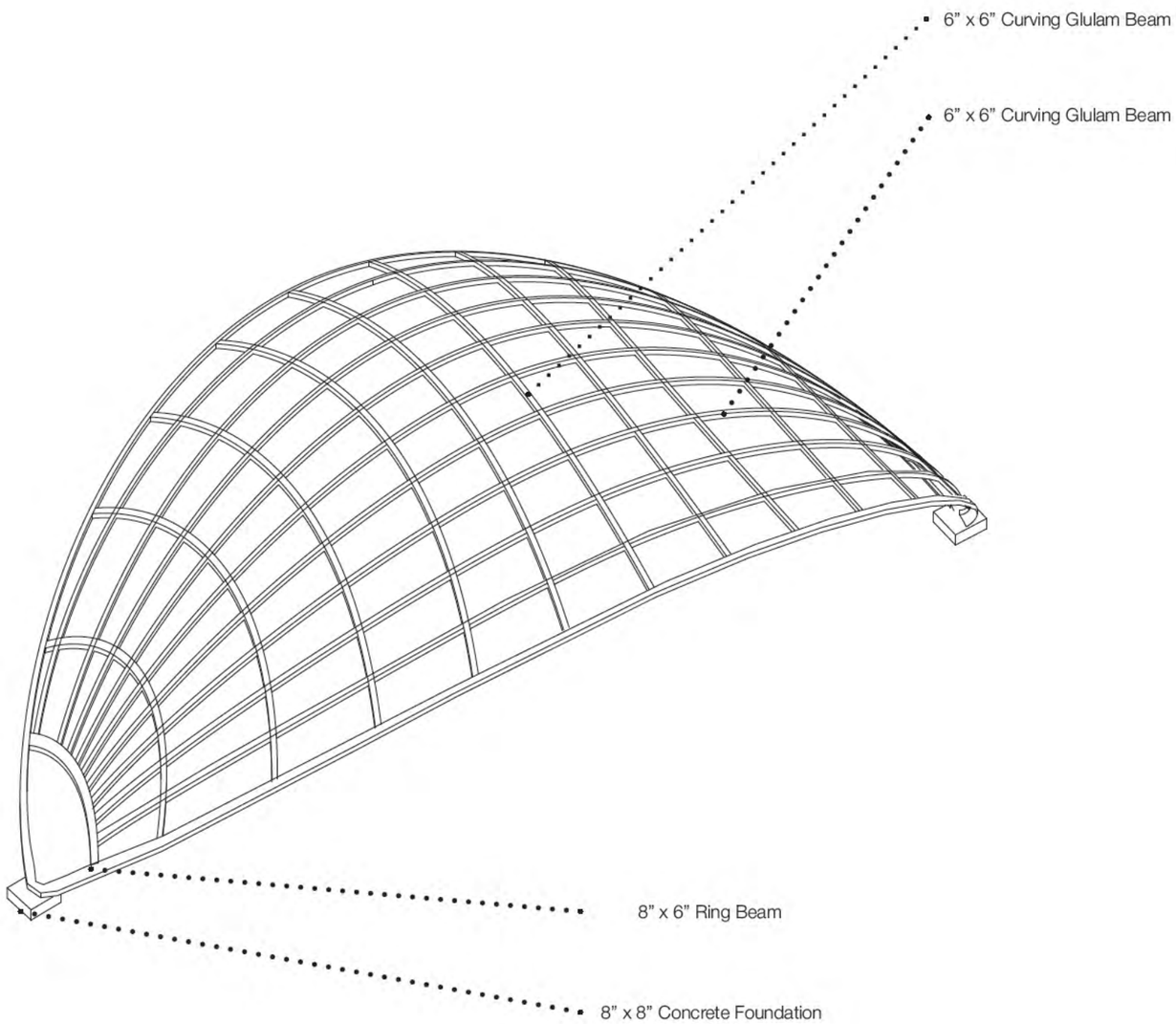
Geometric Model Photograph



Geometric Model Photograph

The proposal sits lightly within the landscape, balancing sculptural presence with openness to the park.

Structure



Structural Study 1

Structural Study 2

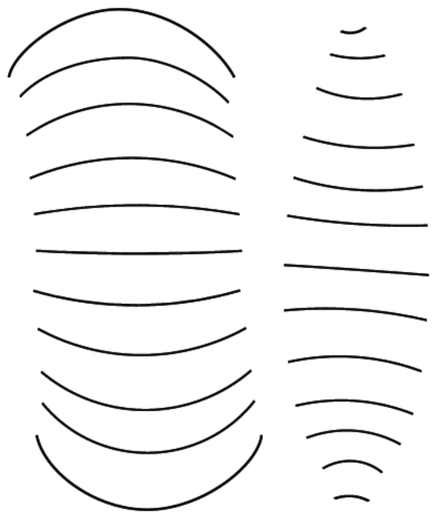
Structural Study 3

Structural Study 4

Curved glulam ribs and secondary timber members form an efficient spanning shell inspired by the logic of a leaf.

Aerial View

A raised walkway and planted landscape extend the project beyond the stage into a larger park experience.



An early study of the structure, which interestingly resembles sound-waves.

1. How does your design relate to the theme of Soundscapes in Structure?

The theme Soundscapes in Structure is approached through the idea that structure itself can become an acoustic instrument. Rather than treating the bandshell as an object placed within the park, the proposal uses form, material, and geometry to shape how sound is projected, received, and experienced. A sweeping timber shell rises from two grounded points and opens toward the audience, gathering and directing sound outward while remaining open to the landscape. In this way, the project understands performance architecture not as a backdrop, but as an active participant in the event itself.

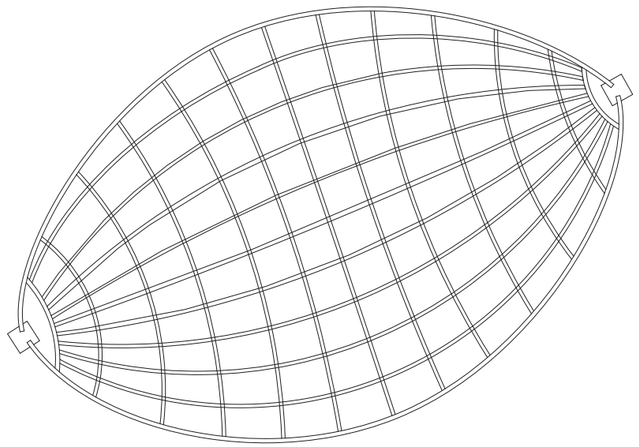
The curved leaf-like form was developed to combine resonance with visual clarity. Its inner surface creates a sheltered chamber for live music, spoken word, and community gatherings, while open edges allow sound to travel naturally into surrounding lawns and public areas. The shell's profile is high enough to create presence and projection, yet light enough to preserve views across Marjorie Park. Rather than enclosing sound completely, the proposal balances reflection and openness, allowing performances to feel connected to the larger landscape.

The structure is conceived as a family of laminated timber members that work together as both support system and spatial enclosure. The same members that carry loads also define the acoustic volume beneath them, making structure inseparable from experience. Timber offers warmth, tactility, and strong acoustic qualities well suited to performance, while also supporting a sustainable construction strategy through renewable material use, prefabrication potential, and regional sourcing opportunities. The lattice of curved members recalls the branching logic of a leaf, reinforcing the project's relationship to the surrounding park while giving the structure a memorable civic identity.

The proposal extends the meaning of soundscape beyond the stage itself through a raised walkway passing through the adjacent retention landscape. The path creates a gentle elevated route through nature where visitors experience changing sounds of wind, planting, water movement, footsteps on timber planks, and distant performances. This transforms the marsh from leftover ground into an active sensory environment linked to the venue.

By touching the earth at only two primary points, the shell minimizes disturbance to the marshy terrain and preserves long views through the site. This efficient structural strategy reduces material use and construction cost, allowing a greater portion of the budget to support planting, habitat enhancement, and public circulation improvements. Structure therefore becomes not only a formal and acoustic device, but also a means of giving more back to the landscape.

For the Museum of Outdoor Arts, the proposal aims to create a landmark that is both sculptural and useful. During events it performs as an instrument for gathering and sound; during quiet hours it remains an inhabitable artwork, walkway destination, and place of rest. In that sense, Soundscapes in Structure is realized as the union of architecture, ecology, public life, and performance.



Plan of the lattice shell-structure.

2. Describe the proposed materials, including required native materials, and methods used to build/install your struture/artwork/installation

The proposal is a lightweight timber bandshell formed from curved laminated wood members, secondary lattice framing, a white protective roof surface, and compact concrete foundations. Timber is the primary material for its warmth, acoustic quality, structural efficiency, and sustainable character. Glulam ribs and curved secondary members create the leaf-like shell and express the span.

A white outer skin provides weather protection and visual clarity, while the interior remains exposed timber to support the acoustic atmosphere of performances. Concealed steel plates and bolted connections allow durable assembly.

The shell touches the ground at two reinforced foundation points using compact concrete pile caps with helical piles or pier supports below grade, minimizing disturbance to the marshy retention area.

Native Colorado-adapted grasses, wetland planting, and low-water species are proposed to enhance the surrounding landscape. A companion elevated walkway uses timber decking on slender supports, allowing visitors to move through the site with minimal impact.

Most elements are prefabricated off site by regional fabricators, improving quality and reducing installation time.

3. Describe how your concept will be constructed? How long would construction take?

The proposal is designed for prefabrication and efficient on-site assembly. Because the bandshell touches the ground at only two points, construction is concentrated and minimizes disruption to the surrounding landscape.

Work begins with surveying, site protection, and installation of helical piles or piers, followed by compact reinforced concrete foundations. This phase is expected to take two to three weeks.

At the same time, curved timber ribs, lattice members, steel hardware, and roof components are fabricated off site. Once foundations are complete, the primary ribs are delivered and erected by crane, then connected by secondary members and ring beams.

After the frame is stabilized, the white roof surface, walkway, planting, lighting, and final site improvements are installed. Portable seating may be added depending event use.

Total construction duration is estimated at 8 to 12 weeks, depending weather, fabrication lead times, and permitting.

Marjorie Park's liveliness is unmatched in Colorado.

4. How was collaboration utilized in realizing the design?

Collaboration was central to the development of the proposal, combining architectural design, structural thinking, landscape planning, and public-use considerations into a single concept. The project required balancing performance needs, site sensitivity, construction feasibility, and artistic identity rather than treating them as separate problems. Design decisions were approached through an iterative process in which form, structure, circulation, and landscape improvements informed one another.

The timber shell was developed through coordination between architectural intent and structural logic, ensuring that the expressive leaf-like form could also perform as an efficient spanning system. Landscape considerations shaped the placement of the walkway, planting strategy, and minimal ground contact points within the retention area. Material and budget decisions were also integrated early, allowing the proposal to remain ambitious while realistic.

Collaboration was therefore understood not only as working across disciplines, but as creating a proposal where architecture, ecology, engineering, and public experience operate together as one cohesive design.

5. How will your structure/installation be used by the public? How was safety addressed?

The proposal is designed as a public performance venue, gathering space, and everyday landscape destination. During concerts, lectures, and community events, the bandshell functions as a stage and acoustic enclosure for audiences gathered in front of the structure. Outside scheduled events, it remains an open civic landmark where visitors may rest, meet, walk through the site, or experience the surrounding landscape.

The elevated walkway extends public use beyond the stage itself, allowing visitors to move through the retention landscape and engage the park from new viewpoints. This creates value for the site during both active programming and regular daily visits.

Safety was addressed through clear circulation routes, accessible paths, durable materials, slip-resistant walking surfaces, and stable foundations suited to marshy ground conditions. Structural members are designed to current engineering standards, while railings, lighting, and visibility along the walkway improve user comfort and security. The result is a space that is welcoming, durable, and safe for a wide range of visitors.

Sample of construction of a latticed member.

6. How does the structure/artwork/installation address the climate in which it would reside?

The proposal is designed for Colorado's varied climate, including strong sun, seasonal snow, wind, rain, and temperature swings. The curved shell provides shade during warmer months while creating a sheltered performance space that remains open to natural ventilation. Its elevated and open-sided form allows air movement through the structure, reducing heat buildup and improving comfort for performers and visitors.

The roof surface is shaped to shed rain and snow efficiently, while the compact two-point foundation strategy minimizes disturbance to wet ground conditions within the retention landscape. Durable timber members are protected through exterior finishes and detailing that limit moisture exposure and extend lifespan.

Native and drought-tolerant planting surrounding the project supports seasonal resilience while reducing long-term irrigation needs. The walkway allows visitors to experience the landscape year-round without damaging sensitive ground conditions. Overall, the design responds to climate through shade, ventilation, water management, durable materials, and ecological stewardship.

7. What type of technology is implemented in your design, if any?

The proposal uses technology in a focused and practical way, prioritizing performance, fabrication, and long-term durability. The timber shell is intended to use digitally modeled geometry and CNC-assisted fabrication to produce accurate curved structural members and efficient connection components. This allows the expressive form to be built with precision while reducing waste and simplifying assembly.

Prefabrication is another important aspect of the project. Major structural elements can be manufactured off site, labeled, transported, and rapidly installed, reducing construction time and impact on the park. Concealed steel connectors and engineered timber systems further improve structural performance.

For public use, integrated lighting may be included within the shell and walkway to support evening events, visibility, and safety. Low-energy LED fixtures can highlight performances while minimizing power use. Technology is therefore used not as spectacle, but as a tool to make the project more buildable, efficient, and welcoming.

Colorado features diverse landscape, weather, and climatic conditions.

8. What makes the design environmentally friendly/sustainable?

The proposal is environmentally conscious through its material choices, compact footprint, and long-term relationship to the site. Timber is the primary structural material, offering a renewable resource with lower embodied carbon than many conventional systems while also allowing prefabrication and reduced construction waste. The use of regional fabrication can further reduce transportation impacts.

By touching the ground at only two primary foundation points, the structure minimizes excavation and preserves more of the existing retention landscape. This light footprint reduces disruption to soil, planting, and water movement. The elevated walkway similarly allows visitors to experience the site while protecting sensitive ground conditions below.

The surrounding landscape is enhanced with native and drought-tolerant planting suited to Colorado's climate, reducing irrigation demand and supporting habitat value. Natural ventilation, open-air gathering, and shaded public space also lessen the need for mechanical systems. Sustainability is therefore approached through efficient structure, ecological sensitivity, durable materials, and low-impact public use.

9. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your proposal?

This proposal is intended not only as a bandshell, but as an extension of the Museum of Outdoor Arts' mission of making art part of everyday life. During performances, it becomes a civic stage for music, gathering, and cultural programming. During quieter moments, it remains a sculptural landmark, walkway destination, and place of rest within the landscape.

The design seeks to balance bold identity with restraint. Its leaf-like form creates a memorable presence while preserving views across Marjorie Park and respecting the character of the site. The project aims to feel specific to Colorado, specific to the museum, and capable of becoming part of the everyday life of visitors.

Above all, the proposal hopes to show that a public structure can be artistic, buildable, environmentally responsible, and welcoming at the same time.

10. Provide an estimated budget.

Division	Item	Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Amount	Notes
01 General Condition	**Mobilization / Setup**	**1**	**LS**	**$8,000**	**$8,000**	
01 General Condition	Survey / Layout	1	LS	$4,500	$4,500	
01 General Condition	Site Protection / Erosion Control	1	LS	$6,500	$6,500	
02 Foundations	**Helical Piles**	**8**	**EA**	**$3,500**	**$28,000**	
02 Foundations	Pile Caps / Concrete Footings	2	EA	$12,000	$24,000	
02 Foundations	Anchor Bolts / Base Plates	2	EA	$3,500	$7,000	
03 Timber Shell	**Primary Curved Glulam Ribs**	**11**	**EA**	**$6,500**	**$66,000**	
03 Timber Shell	Secondary Curved Members	12	EA	$2,200	$26,400	
03 Timber Shell	Ring Beam Members	1	LS	$18,000	$18,000	
03 Timber Shell	CNC Fabrication / Shop Drawings	1	LS	$14,000	$14,000	
03 Timber Shell	Protective Finish / Sealer	1	LS	$9,000	$9,000	
04 Roof Surface	**White Roof Panels / Membrane**	**1**	**LS**	**$26,000**	**$22,000**	
04 Roof Surface	Flashing / Drainage Edge	1	LS	$6,500	$6,500	
05 Stage Area	**Performance Platform Framing**	**1**	**LS**	**$18,000**	**$18,000**	
05 Stage Area	Decking Surface	1	LS	$12,000	$12,000	
05 Stage Area	Portable Seating Chairs	80	EA	$95	$7,600	
06 Walkway	**Support Posts / Piers**	**14**	**EA**	**$900**	**$12,600**	
06 Walkway	Framing Beams / Joists	1	LS	$14,000	$14,000	
06 Walkway	Timber Decking Planks	1	LS	$18,000	$18,000	
06 Walkway	Railings / Edge Protection	1	LS	$9,000	$9,000	
07 Electrical	**LED Performance Lighting**	**1**	**LS**	**$14,000**	**$14,000**	
07 Electrical	Walkway / Site Lighting	1	LS	$9,000	$9,000	
07 Electrical	Power / Wiring / Panels	1	LS	$12,000	$12,000	
08 Landscape	**Native Planting**	**1**	**LS**	**$16,000**	**$16,000**	
08 Landscape	Wetland Soil Repair / Mulch	1	LS	$9,000	$9,000	
08 Landscape	Irrigation Establishment	1	LS	$6,000	$6,000	
09 Equipment	**Crane / Lift Rental**	**1**	**LS**	**$18,000**	**$18,000**	
09 Equipment	Temporary Bracing / Scaffolding	1	LS	$9,000	$9,000	
10 Labor	**Shell Installation Crew**	**1**	**LS**	**$28,000**	**$28,000**	
10 Labor	Walkway / Landscape Crew	1	LS	$18,000	$18,000	
11 Contingency	**Contingency Allowance**	**1**	**LS**	**$25,000**	**$18,000**	
				Total	**$488,100**	