



DESIGN LAB

Activity Areas to Explore Engineering and Design Challenges at the New York Hall of Science

Queens, N.Y. – On Saturday, June 7, 2014, the New York Hall of Science (NYSCI) opened *Design Lab*, a permanent exhibition that taps into people’s natural tendency to be inventive and resourceful in finding solutions to basic engineering and design challenges. *Design Lab* consists of five visually and thematically distinct activity areas that evoke a sense of childlike playfulness and imagination. The activities encourage visitors to be creative while experimenting with structures, circuits, simple materials and more. *Design Lab* transforms the lower level of the Central Pavilion, part of NYSCI’s original facility built for the 1964-65 World’s Fair.

“With *Design Lab*, we are exploring a new form of engagement between a museum and its visitors,” said Margaret Honey, President and CEO of NYSCI. “Science museums have always been known for hands-on exhibits and participatory programs, but with *Design Lab*, visitors are in the driver’s seat like never before. You can think, build, test and refine your ideas, putting creative design and engineering to work as you overcome obstacles, solve problems, and point the way to a better world.”

Design Lab activities use common, everyday materials to emphasize that creativity is not dependent on specialized tools or expert knowledge. Instead, the activities show how expertise is achieved through experimentation, critical thinking and collaboration. Displays showcase the work of previous visitors to provide inspiration for new creations. From the beginning, teachers and educators have played an important role in the development of *Design Lab*’s activities and content. One of the goals of *Design Lab* is to ensure that school groups and teachers can transfer concepts related to design and engineering from NYSCI back into the classroom.

Design Lab’s five activity areas include:

- **Backstage**, where families work together on an engineering challenge, using everyday materials to design and test solutions to engineering problems using design thinking.
- **Sandbox**, where visitors can explore simple machines by designing systems to harness kinetic and potential energy while developing group work and engineering skills.
- **Studio**, where visitors work on design challenges, finding solutions to interesting and fun problems using materials you know and see everyday.
- **Treehouse**, a split-level area for experiments and activities requiring a vertical drop. In this space, museum-goers use pulleys, zip lines and other items to create a method to move objects between two levels.
- **Maker Space**, which opened in 2012, shows visitors how to use tools that convert design ideas into prototypes.



New York Hall of Science



Activities are free with general NYSCI admission for individuals and families. Camp and school groups can reserve *Design Lab* sessions by calling 718-699-0301 in advance of their visit.

Design Lab was designed and fabricated by SITU Studio, located in Brooklyn, NY. SITU developed a series of flexible activity areas, each distinct in size, materials and degree of enclosure with structural elements purposely made visible to visitors, inspiring a DIY sensibility. Intended to frame and support a variety of programming activities at different scales for audiences of all ages and experiences, *Design Lab* inspires visitors to share ideas in an iterative, creative design process and reflect on design precedents with built-in storage and display systems. While smaller nooks allow for observation, desk-free open spaces are suited for group activities. The visual vocabulary for the activity areas is playful, yet sophisticated, evoking imaginative experiences of childhood, but reframing it toward new possibilities.

“Our ambition for *Design Lab* was to create an environment that would celebrate NYSCI’s innovative work in science education and learning through interest-driven creative design processes. To achieve this goal, our challenge as designers was to develop a series of workshops flexible enough to support the myriad activities they will host today and in the future. SITU and NYSCI share the belief that the Maker Movement presents new ways of thinking about the intersection of design and science – this project presented a perfect opportunity to explore this theme together,” said Aleksey Lukyanov-Cherny, partner at SITU Studio.

Design Lab is made possible with generous support from Phyllis and Ivan Seidenberg, the Verizon Foundation, Office of Naval Research and the Xerox Foundation. The Verizon Foundation provided seed funding for Design Lab that supported the participation of teachers to contribute to and inform the exhibition.

The New York Hall of Science – The mission of the New York Hall of Science (NYSCI) is to nurture generations of passionate learners, critical thinkers and active citizens through an approach called Design, Make, Play. Design, Make, Play emphasizes open-ended exploration, imaginative learning and personal relevance, resulting in deep engagement and delight in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. NYSCI was founded at the 1964-65 World’s Fair and has evolved into New York’s center for interactive science serving a half million students, teachers and families each year. NYSCI is open Monday – Friday, 9:30 am – 5 pm and weekends, 10 am – 6 pm. General admission is \$16 for adults and \$13 for children (ages 2-17), college students with valid ID, and seniors (62+). For more information, visit nysci.org or call 718-699-0005. Follow NYSCI on Twitter and Instagram: @nysci, and on Facebook at: facebook.com/nysci.

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