

the

VANCOUVER
MUSEUM
STORY

a vision for change

PROVOKE

ENGAGE

ANIMATE

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UNIVERSITY

VANCOUVER

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INTRODUCTION

The Vancouver Museum has embarked on a process of envisioning and re-invention.

This story is the blueprint for our future.

It answers the questions: who and what we are; what we stand for; what will make us unique and compelling for visitors; and how we can enrich life for every resident of this city.

Museums are institutions steeped in tradition yet surrounded by constant change. We have authored this story as a response to this challenge.

Within these pages you'll find language and ideas from our staff, board, external friends and advisors, and members of the community distilled down to their essence. These themes and ideas are key to our identity. They form the foundation of our vision, now and for the future.

Provocative. Engaging. Passionate. Inventive. Stylish. Socially-minded. Relevant. Courageous.

Of the city. For the city.

This is your Vancouver Museum.

And this is its story, looking and moving ahead.

OUR VISION

To hold a mirror up to the city and
lead provocative conversations about its past,
present and future.



MOLLY

dolet

Super Save
General
624-4422

The following pages articulate
the Vancouver Museum's six key
themes for change.



FOCUS

Vancouver is the story.
Vancouver is our subject.

The Vancouver Museum will train its focus on Vancouver and make the city our primary subject.

We will no longer attempt to bring the world to Vancouver, but instead, reflect and connect Vancouver to the world.

VANCOUVER MUSEUM: A BRIEF PROFILE

- The Vancouver Museum has a tremendous collection that includes over 100,000 objects ranging from Coast Salish cultural objects to one of the world's great collections of neon signs. This collection belongs to the City of Vancouver and its residents.
- The collection is housed in a purpose-built building in the burgeoning cultural district of Vanier Park and offers one of the most unique and complete views of the mountains, English Bay, Burrard Inlet and the downtown core.
- We are currently governed by the Vancouver Museum Commission, a board of 15 people appointed by the City. The Vancouver Museum Association is the Museum's membership body with over 800 members.



The
ONLY

SEA FOOD

FISH • OYSTERS • C

THE POWER IS IN THE MIX

Our entry point is the material culture of the city.

But we will use a much broader range of disciplines to interpret Vancouver and unlock its stories. Our toolbox will include the artifacts and narratives in our collection but we will “mix things up” by incorporating new areas of investigation like the visual arts, design, architecture, urban planning, music, new media, fashion, popular culture and photography.

The power is in the mix — and this mix is what is relevant in contemporary Vancouver.

EL STRATHCONA
PIERRE PARIS
*You never lose with
Pierre's Shoes*



SIGNKRAFT

Model
BOOT SHOP
OPEN ON
CHARGE
ACCOUNT

FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

SHOES ON CREDIT
Model
BOOT SHOP

RADIOE
RADIOES • GRANGES
REFRIGERATORS
See & Service
STANDARD
ELECTRICAL • HARDWARE

PIERRE PARIS & SONS

PIERRE PARIS & SONS

BECK'S

Miller's

JOBS
FOR LEISURE
PIONER
CLOTHING
CANNAS GOODS

CLOTHING FACTORY



HISTORY IN CONTEXT

We will examine contemporary concerns in relation to the past.

The Vancouver Museum will always make links between the historical record and the living experiences of our visitors — what is happening socially, politically and culturally *now*.

THE HISTORY OF THE MUSEUM

The Vancouver Museum's roots date back to the city's earliest years as a colonial logging town.

- In the spring of 1894, the Art, Historical and Scientific Association opened Vancouver's first Museum Exhibition, which invited visitors to view "Paintings and Curios".
- In 1897 the society handed over its collection to the City of Vancouver, who agreed to preserve it. Then, in 1905, the City Museum and its collection moved to the Carnegie Library at Main and Hastings.
- In 1968, the Museum moved into the Gerald Hamilton-designed building in Vanier Park and was renamed the Centennial Museum.
- In 1981, the name was changed to the Vancouver Museum.
- By 2000, the Museum embarked on a capital renewal to rebuild all of the history galleries, and continues the work of completing its permanent galleries.
- In 2002, thanks to a generous donor, a new wing was added to the building including a learning centre, a local history lab and additional exhibition space.



HAIDA

THE NEW COMMONS: A PLACE FOR PROVOCATIVE CONVERSATIONS

We will become a gathering place for dialogue.
And we will become agents for provocative
conversations.

We no longer meet our neighbours in the town
square. With the exploding diversity of the city
and the pace of technological change, there
are fewer and fewer places to come face-to-
face with fellow citizens.

The Vancouver Museum will become a new
town hall for a city hungry for connection —
a gathering place that will encourage social
engagement and dialogue on issues of interest
and concern.

Controversial, sometimes.
Stimulating, always.



千禧門

天下無難事 只要肯去做 萬事成 有志者 事竟成 破釜沉舟 百戰百勝 無所畏懼

OPENING DOORS

We will seek greater participation and access for all residents: both by taking our programming out into communities and by involving many more citizens in our vision.

The new Vancouver Museum must go further to meet our audiences where they live and to reflect their values and interests. This means more consultation, more collaboration, and more opportunities for involving citizens in the life of the Museum.



INNOVATIVE STORYTELLING

It is our job to communicate, to touch, to interact, to respond. We will create innovative environments and events that make stories real, that spur the imagination, that awaken the emotions, and — most critically — that expand understanding.

We will live this approach to connecting with our audiences through creative storytelling, leading-edge exhibit design, adventurous programming, and a unique exploration of Vancouver's resonant images, artifacts, people and places.



PIONEER VANCOUVER

- mason jar
- whirly-gig
- plate fragment
- (2) blocks

OUR VALUES

This process has involved asking a lot of questions and tapping into the wellspring of creativity and enthusiasm in this city. But perhaps more significantly, it has meant going inward to understand what really matters to this cultural institution and the people who work here.

During this period of change and transformation, the staff and board have identified a set of values considered central to the identity of the Vancouver Museum, regardless of changes that may come.

We are in a time when museums have become ethical systems: they present to society the things and the ideas that we believe are worth valuing. And so we must be clear about the enduring values that are central to who and what we are. You will see these values echoed in our vision.

- **Integrity and Excellence**

We will act with the highest ethical and professional standards in our work, with our visitors, colleagues and communities.

- **Community Engagement**

We value and seek input and collaboration from as many and as diverse community voices as possible.

- **Dialogue and Debate**

We will act with courage by anticipating and reflecting socio-cultural changes and by providing a forum for critical discussions, no matter how difficult or challenging.

- **Promotion of Intercultural Understanding**

We will seek opportunities for the many cultures that co-exist here to learn about and from each other.

- **Passionate Advocacy for Vancouver**

We care deeply about this city and where it is going and how it arrived here — we want to inspire that kind of passionate concern and interest in our visitors.



HOW DID WE ARRIVE HERE?

In 2007, the Vancouver Museum embarked on a visioning process.

We launched this project with a high-level brainstorming session: a group of board members, senior staff, and trusted advisors from the community and across Canada, united to build on our significant assets and identify a way forward.

The result was a set of initial ideas and assumptions we have tested and developed further with input from the staff and dozens of community stakeholders.

Our interviews and focus groups have invited input from audiences ranging from funders, educators, volunteers, cultural leaders to community activists, academics, and First Nations leaders. We will continue to ask for input and direction as we implement this new direction.

The focus and ideas articulated in our vision — fed by the ideas, creativity and goodwill of many — will provide the impetus for our strategic planning and our transformation in the years to come. The Vancouver Museum recognizes that we need to change as the world is changing around us.



VANCOUVER MILL MACHINERY 1968

1ST AVE. PLANT

MATCON
EXCAVATING LTD.
530-1402

FALSE CREEK
TERMINAL LTD
218 WEST AVE
SUMMEREGUE LTD
2115 BANG AVE
2115 BANG AVE

"History for its own sake is not particularly interesting to me...I do think that if you could find a way to link Vancouver's history with craft/design/materials to its current relationship it might be very educational. I believe we might be able to learn from seeing the way we have relied on resources in the last few decades and that we didn't always, we might be able to see the folly in that."

— key informant

NO PARKING

WHY THIS SHIFT?

Our process of renewal and regeneration has taken place in a global context of transformation for museums.

It also reflects dramatic changes in our own urban environment.

And it comes from a recognition that, as a publicly funded organization with a priceless collection that belongs to all Vancouverites, we have a responsibility to enrich life in this city, to ask important questions and to connect communities through culture.

Vancouver is a city in need of common spaces for discussion and dialogue.

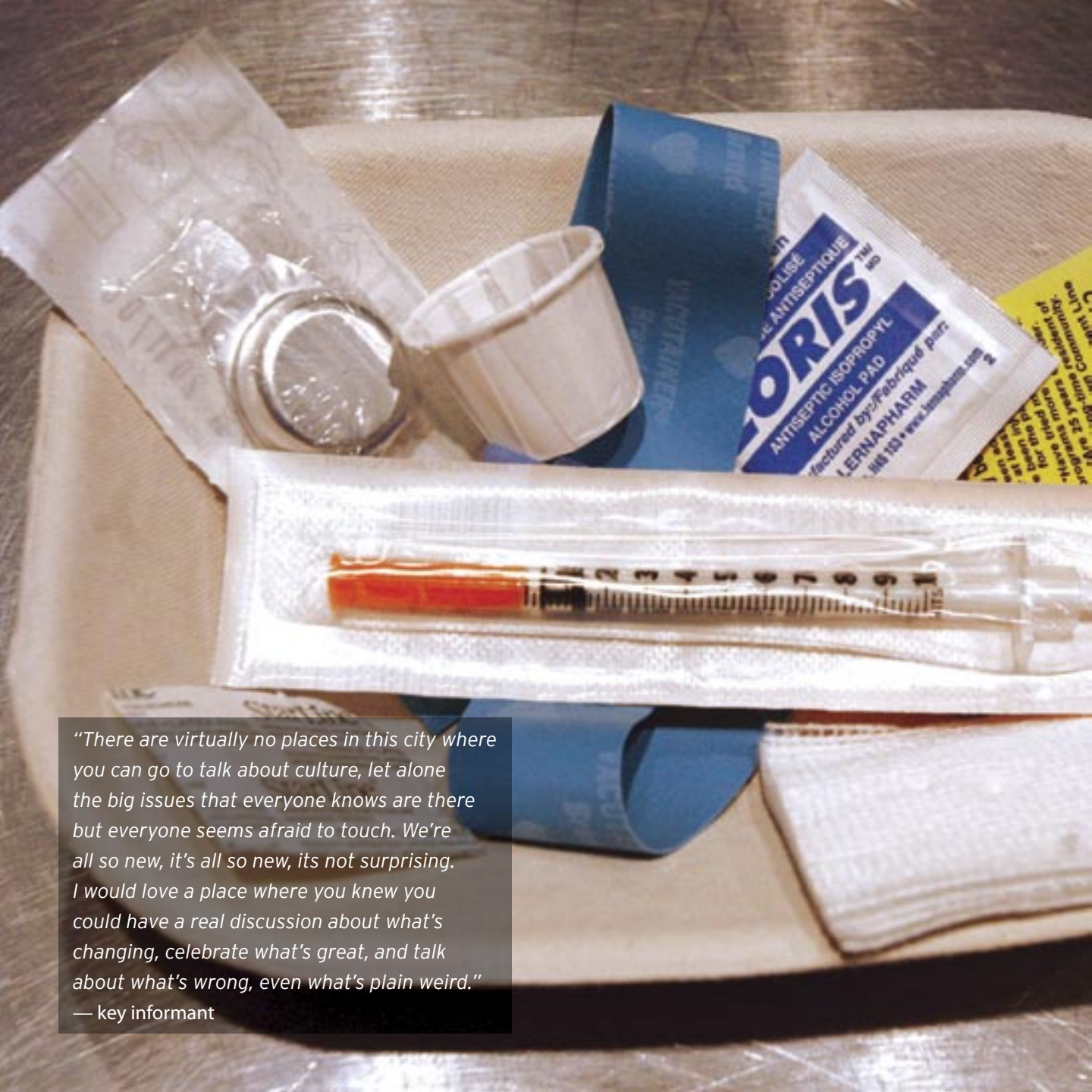
Trends across Europe and North America have seen museums building and expanding on their traditional functions of collection, research, conservation, exhibition and education to become instruments of urban renewal and social integration: new gathering places for dialogue and exploration of contemporary concerns.

We see a growing role for museums to help shape and foster discussion about pressing issues for cities and to use material culture as a springboard — a portal for this exploration.

Vancouver, in particular, is a city ripe for self-examination and calling out for common spaces for discussion and dialogue.

Why? The reasons are numerous and as complex as the city itself.

Vancouver's relative youth is part of what makes this a vibrant and exciting place to be — a frontier where the future of urban living is being shaped before our eyes.



“There are virtually no places in this city where you can go to talk about culture, let alone the big issues that everyone knows are there but everyone seems afraid to touch. We’re all so new, it’s all so new, its not surprising. I would love a place where you knew you could have a real discussion about what’s changing, celebrate what’s great, and talk about what’s wrong, even what’s plain weird.”
— key informant

Yet this youth also puts the city very close to its colonial past. The layers of post-contact history are not centuries old as in other places. As a city, Vancouver is mere decades from sometimes brutal conflicts over land, resources, and rights to citizenship. Now layer on the complexities of a rapidly growing city with transient and migrant populations, exploding diversity and a mix of distinct cultures.

Then add the sometimes exciting but also decentralizing effects of technology that have eroded town squares and common spaces in favour of other kinds of less personal connection — social networking is something we now do at home alone.

What develops is a growing picture of a segmented and particularized city at risk of a kind of collective amnesia. One that doesn't take into account the richness and possibilities in connection. One with citizens too busy and distracted to look at how Vancouver has arrived at this place at this moment in history.

The core idea: Vancouver itself must become the focus, the story and the driver for the museum.

We have also been inspired by the tremendous international interest in Vancouver. One of our external advisors, noted architecture critic Trevor Boddy, has observed: "Vancouver, as an idea, as a way of living is replacing Manhattanism as the maximum power setting of contemporary city-building."

To "Vancouverize" or "Vancouverism" are terms that those who study urban environments have become well aware of in recent years. Wave after wave of urbanists come to our city to study our iconic landscape. The city has routinely been named the number one tourist destination city, one of the top three most livable cities in the World, and is a model for contemporary, sustainable and livable city-building. Yet who is telling this story? Who has connected the emergence pre-contact and post-colonial to this new reality? Who is documenting this shift into global stature? And where are the opportunities for residents and visitors to participate in these debates?



"I'm not interested in the genteel whitebread approach to culture. This city is complex and sophisticated entirely because of its diversity and the cultures that are mixing and creating new hybrid forms. Think about exhibits that explore Bhangra music, Bubble tea, Asian cuisine – what is new and interesting and what does it say about who we are. Now I would come down here any evening for that."

— key informant

Clearly there is a role, and we suggest a need, for an organization to delve into the very idea, the concept and the fibre of Vancouver. An organization that claims the whole city as its realm of study. Within and without its four walls. Its back alleys and main streets. Its beloved gathering places and forgotten corners.

An institution with a collection strategy that puts the material culture of Vancouver at its core.

An energized, thriving place with permanent and temporary exhibits that activate discussion and debate. A place that takes an unorthodox yet thoroughly modern approach to the material culture of the city: mixing history, archaeology, architecture, visual arts, technology, fashion, urban planning and design. And a place that links the historical record and the living experiences of our visitors: making connections to what is happening socially, politically and culturally *now*.

We will explore Vancouver as an idea, as neighbourhoods, as people, as cultures, as buildings, as historical record and contested land: every facet from imagined and ideal to challenging and real.

In short, a civic museum for Vancouver. There are museums in British Columbia with mandates to collect and study the world and the province, but not one with the resources or the capacity to focus on Vancouver.

Some may ask, weren't we always a museum that explored Vancouver? The short answer is: yes and no. Since the early 1980s, we have had the mission of "building understanding of the City among both residents and visitors". But we have, like many institutions of our vintage, experienced mission drift. This has meant trying to do too much with dwindling resources. And despite this explicit mission, our role has been somewhat muddy. We now have a clear sense of purpose. A clear sense of who we are and what we can contribute.

We must narrow our field of vision to the idea of Vancouver. Yet, at the same time, expand the kind of tools we use to explore this subject, and invite more people to participate in the exploration.



Moving ahead, we are inspired by great models of civic museums in Canada and around the world, including thriving examples in London, New York, and Stockholm. The new focus has been applauded unanimously by our stakeholders. They share our belief that it will draw new audiences as well as invigorate current ones.

Through this process, the board and staff of the Vancouver Museum have attempted to build on the institution's tremendous assets: our astonishing collection featuring hundreds of thousands of remarkable objects and stories; our people — educators, communicators, curators, partners; and our home, in an architecturally important building in one of the most scenic and historically significant points in the city. This acknowledgement of our strengths, along with a need to refine and communicate our identity, was the place we began.

And now, moving forward, we will create a strategic plan that brings these big ideas to fruition. Ideas that will provide the energy, the direction, and the filter the Vancouver Museum needs to carve out a clear and compelling niche for ourselves. One that evolves alongside our increasingly sophisticated, globally-minded city. And one that truly allows us to embody our mission to “build understanding of the City among both residents and visitors”.



PARTICIPATING IN THE LIFE OF THE VANCOUVER MUSEUM

Another core element in this new vision is a shift in how we approach community engagement.

We strongly believe that access to arts, culture and design is integral to an urban environment that promotes diversity, education, creativity, tolerance, and the exchange of ideas.

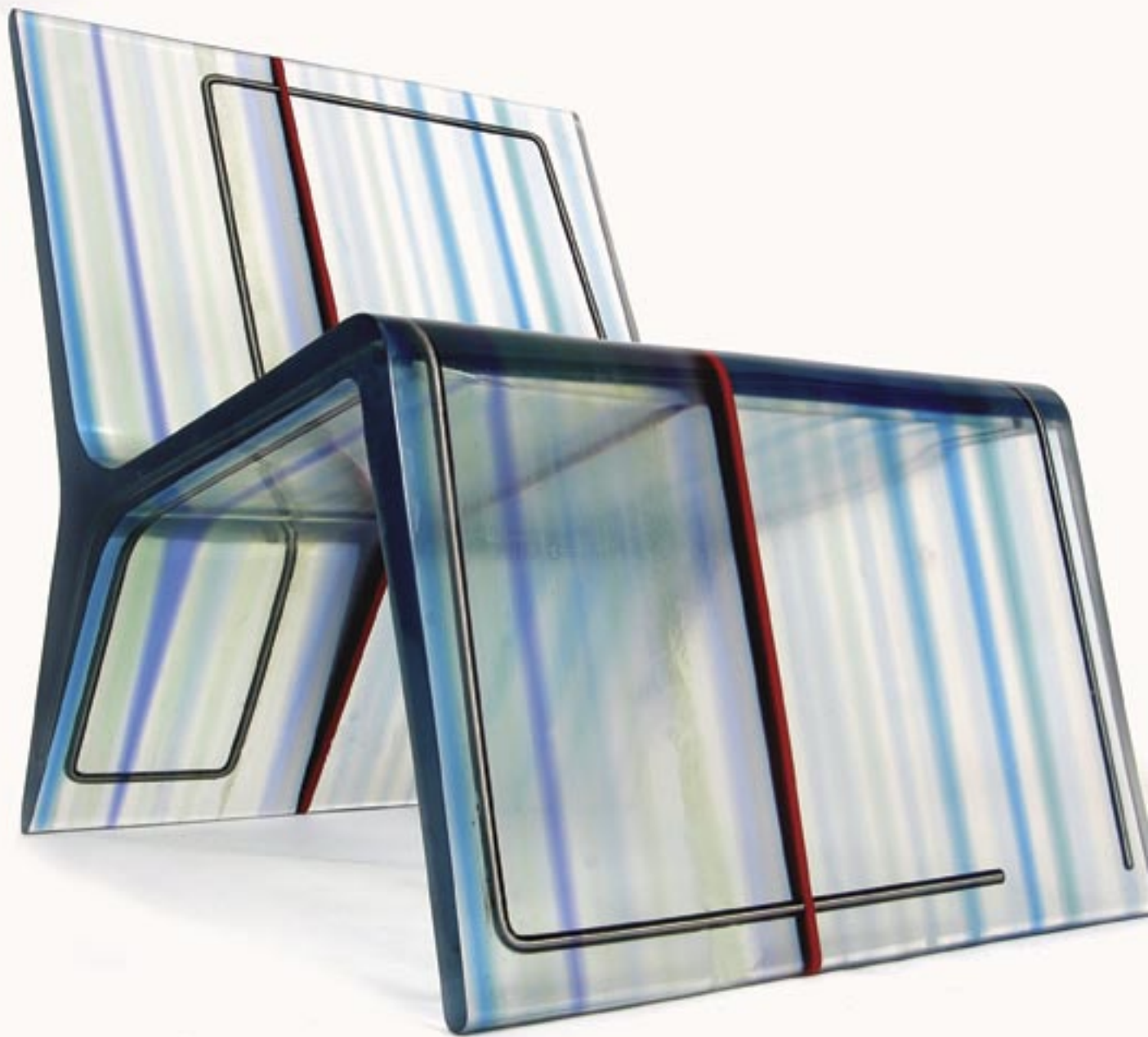
The new Vancouver Museum must go further to meet our audiences where they live — to reflect their values and interests. This means more consultation, more collaboration, and more opportunities for interested members of new and current audiences to participate in the life of the Museum.

Traditionally museums have used the model of in-house experts who create exhibitions and then ask questions later. We want to flip this model on its head. We want to know what is of interest to our stakeholders, and we want to engage them in the process of developing our programs and our storytelling.

We want guest curators to bring a fresh perspective to our collection and to interpreting the city. We want to invite participation from individuals, community organizations, institutions of higher learning, advocacy groups and historical societies.

This shift will not happen overnight. It will require a greater investment of time and resources, but it is our goal.

By engaging with audiences on their own terms, we are moving from a world where we try to entice new audiences to come through our doors once a year to one where broad-based participation is the norm. The Museum's relevance will be ensured by the active, lively and enduring relationships we have created together.



WHAT WILL THIS VISION LOOK LIKE?

In the coming years, you will see a number of changes that emerge as a result of our strategic plan for 2008–2011. Here are a few examples of what's to come:

- * In the spring of 2008, the Museum will present “*Movers and Shapers*”, an ongoing Canadian exhibition series fostering national awareness of Vancouver’s homegrown design talent. *Movers and Shapers* highlights top emerging designers within the various disciplines of architecture, interior, graphic, product, furniture, fashion and interactive design. According to design firm Cause + Affect, which has created, designed and curated this ongoing show, “designers represent a force of creative capital that is transforming our cities...instead of inheriting their future, these designers have chosen to shape it.”
- * In the fall of 2008, the Museum will present a major exhibition “*The Unnatural History of Stanley Park*”. In the wake of last year’s devastating loss of trees in Vancouver’s beloved urban garden, we explore the real stories behind this highly constructed, highly contested space, and what they say about us as a city with green desires and aspirations for justice.
- * The Museum is also committed to building respectful and ongoing collaborations with the Coast Salish First Nations: Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh. It is our priority to develop collaborative exhibition and curatorial strategies for the Museum’s significant collection of Coast Salish Aboriginal cultural art and artifacts as well as explorations of contemporary storytelling, challenges and ideas.

Finally, we are looking at longer-term strategies to create a full experience for visitors.

We know that conveying information can be tough and enabling understanding even more difficult, especially given the range of competing ideas, events and activities in Vancouver.



But we will now place greater attention on how we show as well as tell.

We will create exhibits and a physical experience that capitalize on the aura and impact of our collection. We will use dramatic, leading-edge exhibit design. And we will make the most of our phenomenal views of the city and sought-after facilities.

You will be invited to participate in debates, lectures, conversations, concerts and films. Your visit may also include meeting in our scenic corner of South False Creek for a great meal, an evening drink and a distinctive made-in-Vancouver retail experience.

These are but a few small ideas to give you some sense of our commitment to moving ahead with this new vision.

*“The new type of museum has a real attitude.
It is where the myth of the museum as neutral
space is blown to pieces. It is where museums
and politics meet and embrace.”*

— David Fleming, Director
National Museums Liverpool

