

Norton Simon Museum  
Exterior Improvement Project, 2025  
Fact Sheet

The logo for the Norton Simon Museum, featuring the text "Norton Simon Museum" in white, stacked vertically, on a solid blue square background.

Norton  
Simon  
Museum

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:** Starting in January 2025, the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena, California, embarks on a construction project throughout the exterior areas of its building and campus. This important work, designed by Architectural Resources Group (ARG) in collaboration with the landscape architecture firm SWA, will enhance the beauty of the building’s façade and gardens as well as improve the Museum’s appearance along Colorado and Orange Grove Boulevards. Equally important, the project addresses safety, access, security and sustainability issues that will better serve the Museum’s visitors and staff and protect the exceptional Norton Simon art collection in the decades ahead.

The Exterior Improvement Project coincides with the Museum’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which will kick off in February 2025 with the exhibition *Retrospect: 50 Years at the Norton Simon Museum*, and continue throughout the year with special events, a publication, a major exhibition entitled *Gold* and a community event in October, overlapping with the completion of the Exterior Improvement Project.

**BUILDING HISTORY:** The Museum’s building, which is owned by the Norton Simon Museum but resides on land leased from the city of Pasadena, was designed by Ladd & Kelsey for the Pasadena Art Museum and opened in 1969. The architects Thornton Ladd and John Kelsey commissioned Edith Heath from Heath Ceramics to design the approximately 115,000 tiles that clad the Museum’s façade. In the early 1970s, facing financial difficulties, the Pasadena Art Museum reached out to noted art collector Norton Simon (1907 – 1993) to rescue the faltering institution. He assumed control of the museum in 1974, closing the site for repairs, renovations and the installation of his art collection. The Museum reopened in March of 1975 and was renamed the Norton Simon Museum in October 1975.

In the mid-1990s, Simon’s widow Jennifer Jones Simon and Museum leadership commissioned architect Frank Gehry to remodel the Museum’s galleries to better suit the Simon collections. At the same time landscape designer Nancy Goslee Power was tasked with redesigning the sculpture garden, transforming it from a modernist design to a lush and romantic space that evoked Claude Monet’s garden at Giverny. These major construction projects were revealed to the public in 1999.

**SCOPE OF WORK:** The Museum’s Exterior Improvement Project impacts only exterior areas of the site, including:

- *Tile Restoration and Cleaning:* The Museum’s distinctive tiles underwent a conservation study in 2023 to better understand their condition and to create a plan to clean and conserve them. Over the past several years the Museum has partnered with Heath Ceramics to re-create tiles for use when the original tile are either missing or too damaged for repair. Starting in 2025, tiles on select areas of the building will be cleaned, repaired and, where necessary, replaced. Heath tiles will also be used on a new wall at the eastern edge of the Museum’s south lawn.
- *Site Signage:* Institutional, directional and informational signage will be redesigned and replaced throughout the exterior areas of the campus. Most prominent will be a sign wall featuring the Museum’s name that runs parallel to our primary driveway, signaling to visitors the Museum’s entrance. Three pole banners on the south lawn will feature reproductions of objects in the Museum’s collection. The signage program will create a striking entrance and increase visibility for visitors and passersby.
- *Pedestrian Entry:* The pedestrian path from Colorado Boulevard to the entrance will be rebuilt to meet ADA accessibility requirements and repositioned to align with the bus drop-off zone. This will make it easier and safer for tour groups, schoolchildren and visitors using public transportation to enter the site. The area will be relandscaped with drought-tolerant plants, new lighting and informational signage will be installed, and new gates and walls will provide enhanced security during closed hours. Another significant change will be the relocation of Rodin’s *The Thinker*, which has long overlooked Colorado Boulevard on our south lawn. The sculpture will be installed near the Museum’s front steps, just at the top of the pedestrian path and in proximity to the Museum’s other sculptures by Rodin. This iconic artwork will greet visitors as they make their way to the entrance lobby.
- *Vehicular Entry:* In addition to new signage at our primary driveway, the east driveway will be widened, making it easier and safer to enter and exit our parking lot. A wall will be erected between the two driveways, designed to complement the original podium wall designed by the architectural firm Ladd & Kelsey, which spans the building’s southern and eastern edges. Both driveways will have gates that will be open during business hours. The area in between the two driveways will be relandscaped with drought-tolerant plants and illuminated for safety.

- *Sculpture Garden Repairs and Improvements:* The most time-consuming work will occur in the Museum’s Sculpture Garden, which was designed by Nancy Goslee Power in the late 1990s. While the overall look and feel of the garden will be maintained, important repairs will take place, necessitating the closure of the garden for much of the year. Most significantly, the pond will be drained and rebuilt, a process that will reduce its depth and lower the water level to below grade, while minimizing the pond size at its eastern edge. The pond’s plastic liner will be replaced with concrete for longevity, and a new biofiltration system will be installed. The fountain in the northwest section will be reengineered so that the water passes under the pedestrian path and cascades into the pond, creating a dynamic connection between the garden’s water features. Swales and bioswales will capture rainwater and prevent flooding during storms. The garden’s paths will be repaired using resin-bound gravel that is permeable but stable, allowing for greater access to the garden during the rainy season. Hardscaping in the Café area will be replaced, and a new species of tree will be planted to provide more shade. New seating will be installed along the pond’s southern edge and in the west portion of the garden. And finally, the steel picket fence on the south and west perimeter will be replaced with a solid wall that will reduce the noise caused by traffic on Colorado and Orange Grove Boulevards, greatly enhancing the serenity of the beloved garden.

**LENGTH OF PROJECT:** Construction is set to begin in early January 2025 and take approximately nine months. The Sculpture Garden will be closed the duration of the project; the remaining work throughout the campus will take place in phases.

**IMPACT TO VISITORS:** The Museum’s galleries, theater and store will remain open throughout the project. The Museum’s Sculpture Garden will be closed for the entire construction phase, which is anticipated to take nine months. Food services will be temporarily relocated to the lower-level courtyard (accessible by stairs and the elevator). At times, one of the driveways will be closed, and vehicles will be directed to use the other driveway. As we build our new pedestrian path, a temporary path will be erected.

**STAY CONNECTED:** To keep up-to-date on the progress of the Museum’s exterior improvement project and its impact on our visitors, follow us on our social media channels ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#)) or sign up for the Museum’s [e-newsletter](#).

**PROJECT COST:** \$14 million, funded by the Norton Simon Museum

**PROJECT TEAM:**

Architectural Resources Group, Architect

Morley Builders, General Contractor  
SWA, Landscape Design  
Hunt Design, Signage and Wayfinding  
Flux, Lighting Design  
Heath Ceramics, Tile Production  
Psomas, Civil and Structural Engineer  
Rincon, Arborist  
PLANNET, Security Consultant  
ENGEO Incorporated, Geotechnical Engineer  
P2S, Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing Engineer  
Salter, Acoustical Consultant  
Latham & Watkins LLP, Land Use Attorney  
The City of Pasadena

### **About Architectural Resources Group**

Founded in 1980, Architectural Resources Group (ARG) is a nationally recognized full-service architecture, historic preservation, planning and conservation firm with offices in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Portland. ARG projects include new construction in historic settings, adaptive reuse, rehabilitation, historic resource management, planning and materials conservation. The firm spans nearly all sectors, with award-winning work in cultural institutions, hospitality, housing, parks, cultural institutions, higher education and civic institutions. For more information on ARG, please visit their [website](#). Follow ARG and join the conversation on [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

### **About SWA**

SWA is a California-based landscape architecture, planning and urban design firm founded in 1957, and one of the first 100% employee-owned design firms in the U.S. Over the past 70 years, SWA has designed museum gardens and landscapes for clients as wide-ranging as Stanford University, California Academy of Sciences, Chapman University, Fort Worth Museum of Modern Art and Dallas Arboretum. As one of the only landscape architecture firms with a dedicated research and innovation arm, we are invested in fusing our practice with emerging technologies to address issues of climate resilience to better serve our clients. Learn more about SWA on their [website](#).

### **PRESS CONTACTS:**

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