



# FREDERIK MEIJER Gardens & Sculpture Park

---

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT:** John VanderHaagen | Director of Communications | 616-975-3180 | [jvanderhaagen@meijergardens.org](mailto:jvanderhaagen@meijergardens.org)

### **MEIJER GARDENS CELEBRATES SOFT OPENING OF NEW WELCOME CENTER**

*Crown jewel of \$115 million 'Welcoming the World: Honoring a Legacy of Love' expansion project furthers the organization's mission of horticulture, sculpture, the natural environment and the arts.*

**GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – January 4, 2021** – Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, one of the nation's most significant botanic and sculpture experiences, announces the soft opening of the new Welcome Center on January 11, 2021. The 69,000 square-foot building greatly enhances the arrival, admission and orientation experience for guests. The Welcome Center features Contemporary sculpture as well as horticultural elements throughout. Please note: The January 11<sup>th</sup> opening is a soft opening, and not all areas of the building will be open and accessible until fall of 2021. Additional information will be sent regarding the Opening Celebration and Dedication.

"The magnificent new Welcome Center is made possible by the generosity of Fred & Lena Meijer, the extended Meijer family and hundreds of individuals, companies and foundations. The Welcome Center was created in response to an unprecedented embrace of our mission as reflected in our attendance, membership and donor base growth. Our appreciation is deep and sincere," said President & CEO David Hooker. "Our architects, artists and garden designers have created a place to experience our mission that is truly world-class."

Located at the beginning of the journey into the 158-acre main campus, the Welcome Center complements the glass architectural lines of the Lena Meijer Tropical Conservatory and serves as a place for guests to comfortably purchase tickets or a membership, view an orientation film and receive information about their visit. The design ties together the many parts of Meijer Gardens into a coherent and understandable whole and serves to welcome everyone who enters.

The Welcome Center is comprised of two levels, the Main Level and the lower Courtyard Level. Main Level exterior and interior highlights include an expanded and relocated Peter C. & Emajean Cook Entryway, PNC

Portico, expanded and relocated Ram's Garden, Daniel and Pamela DeVos Ticketing Center, expanded coat room and restrooms, a mobility center for complimentary wheelchairs and electric carts, O-A-K Theater and the Garden Pavilion, featuring breathtaking horticultural displays and a stunning new sculpture titled *Utopia* by the Spanish artist Jaume Plensa. The Garden Pavilion is scheduled to open later this year. Courtyard Level highlights include an expanded and relocated Peter M. Wege Library, archives and storage, Lievense Indoor Eating Area and a Courtyard Level garden named Mimi's Garden, featuring a glass enclosed sunken garden that is naturally lit from above.

The new Welcome Center and recently completed Frederik Meijer Gardens Amphitheater and related facilities were designed by award-winning architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien. Their thoughtful approach has united the best of our existing architecture with new facilities, creating a singular aesthetic vocabulary.

"Tod and Billie represent the best of everything. They are widely recognized as some of the premier architects of cultural institutions in the world," said President & CEO David Hooker. "The facilities that they have designed for Meijer Gardens show their highly developed talents and will be enjoyed by many generations."

Tod Williams and Billie Tsien are internationally renowned for their masterful designs. They are the visionaries behind the iconic Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, which contains the most significant collection of Impressionist and early modern art in the world. Similar to the multi-faceted mission of Meijer Gardens, the Barnes Foundation is a product of Dr. Albert Barnes' love of art and Mrs. Laura Barnes' love of horticulture. Along with the Meijer Gardens expansion, their current work also includes the new U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, the renovation of David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City, and the Obama Presidential Center in Jackson Park, Chicago.

"For me, our work for Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park has been a chance to revisit lessons from my childhood, lived and learned growing up in Michigan and the Cranbrook Community," said Tod Williams.

"Landscape, architecture and art are held in a fine balance. It has been a gift to add to this remarkable and beloved community."

"Making a place where all people can experience beauty is the best of all possible work to do," added Billie Tsien.

Meijer Gardens is a celebration of Fred Meijer's love of sculpture, Lena Meijer's love of gardens, and their love for our community. It is also a story of determination and generosity. "Well, we didn't know what we were doing when we started the gardens," said Fred, "but it turned out okay." He was the master of understatement. More

than 12 million people from around the world have joined in this love story by visiting since Meijer Gardens first opened in 1995.

In addition to horticultural details throughout, the Welcome Center will feature prominent works of Contemporary sculpture by celebrated international artists: Jaume Plensa, George Segal, Yinka Shonibare CBE RA, El Anatsui, Kenneth Snelson, Alexander Calder and Marshall Fredericks, whose work first caught the eye of Fred Meijer and began his passion for collecting sculpture. Part of the permanent sculpture collection, the placement of these pieces and horticultural elements reflects the greater Meijer Gardens mission as evidenced throughout the Gardens & Sculpture Park. The exterior and Frey Foundation Plaza leading into the Welcome Center will feature sculpture by Marshall Fredericks, Tony Cragg, Manuel Neri and Henri Laurens.

From every vantage point, the Welcome Center inspires with its integration of architecture, art and horticulture. It is a stage for Meijer Gardens' sculpture collection and a landmark for West Michigan and beyond.

Please note: The January 11<sup>th</sup> opening is a soft opening, and not all areas of the building will be open and accessible until fall of 2021. Additional information will be sent regarding the Opening Celebration and Dedication.

# # #

### **About Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park**

One of the world's most significant botanic and sculpture experiences, Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park served 670,000 visitors in 2019 and was recently listed in the top 30 most visited museums in the United States by *The Art Newspaper*, the leading publication in global art news. The 158-acre main campus features Michigan's largest tropical conservatory; one of the largest interactive children's gardens in the country; arid and Victorian gardens with bronze sculptures by Edgar Degas and Auguste Rodin; a carnivorous plant house; outdoor gardens; and a 1900-seat outdoor amphitheater, featuring an eclectic mix of world-renowned musicians every summer. The internationally acclaimed Sculpture Park features a permanent collection including works by Claes Oldenburg & Coosje van Bruggen, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Richard Serra, Louise Bourgeois, Ai Weiwei and Jaume Plensa, among others. Indoor galleries host changing sculpture exhibitions and have included artists such as Ai Weiwei, Pablo Picasso, Edgar Degas, Mark di Suvero, Jonathan Borofsky, Alexander Calder, Jim Dine and others. In June 2015, the eight-acre Richard & Helen DeVos Japanese Garden at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park opened. Created by renowned designer Hoichi Kurisu, the garden features sculpture by Anish Kapoor, Jenny Holzer, David Nash, George Rickey, Masayuki Koorida, Zhang Huan and Giuseppe Penone.

About Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects | Partners

Tod Williams and Billie Tsien founded their New York architecture studio in 1986. Their practice is focused on reflecting the values of non-profit, cultural and academic institutions toward an architecture of enduring vision. A sense of rootedness, light, texture, detail, and most of all, experience, are at the heart of what they design. Some of their notable past projects include The Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, The Asia Society Hong Kong Center and the Lefrak Center in Prospect Park, Brooklyn.

Their dedication to this work has been recognized by numerous citations including the Praemium Imperiale from the Japan Art Association, National Medal of the Arts from President Obama and the 2013 AIA Architecture Firm Award. In parallel with their practice, Tod and Billie maintain active academic careers, are devoted participants in numerous arts organizations and provide lectures worldwide. As educators and practitioners, they are committed to making a better world through architecture.

[Website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Twitter](#) | [YouTube](#)

[#MeijerGardens](#)