

Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2011



The medieval inspiring the contemporary: Zumthor created an enclosed environment, detached from the busy world beyond

The 2011 Pavilion for London's Serpentine Gallery was designed by world-renowned Swiss architect, Peter Zumthor. Working with the influential Dutch garden designer Piet Oudolf, Zumthor took the concept of a medieval 'hortus conclusus' to create a garden within a garden, a quiet, contemplative room detached from the noise and bustle of the city outside.



Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2011
Designed by Peter Zumthor
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Photography: Hufton+Crow,
John Offenbach and Walter Herfst.



A serene backdrop for an intimate interior

Zumthor’s pavilion was a transitional building, allowing the visitor to disconnect from the outside world as they entered first the building, and then the garden. Constructed from timber and given a painterly, minimalist finish, a series of staggered doorways led visitors along multiple pathways to the stillness of the interior garden within. The pavilion also functioned as a backdrop for the interior planting and the constantly changing light from the atrium, the roof of the pavilion forming a frame for the sky above.

SERPENTINE PEDIGREE

This was the third year that we were invited to build the pavilion, a uniquely varied commission that our team approached with relish, each year providing the opportunity to utilise completely different in-house skills and manufacturing capabilities. Whilst the location and timeframe may have remained constant, the three pavilions we constructed were anything but.

The cloud-like, undulating structure of the 2009 SAANA design saw us draw upon our experience in the manufacture and installation of composite panels and fixings, while the 45 tonnes of pillar-box red steelwork for Jean Nouvel’s striking 2010 pavilion, saw us utilising very different in-house capabilities. Our already large, yet easily expandable production facilities and dedicated teams of experienced, skilled personnel enable us to embrace the variety such innovative projects present.



Each year’s pavilion saw us employing very different manufacturing capabilities



We applied a painterly, minimalist finish



CREATING A SUBTLE SERENITY

For Zumthor's 2011 design, we worked closely with Mace and Arup, the overall consulting engineers, beginning by constructing the 152 truss sections for the lightweight timber frame in our workshops in Yorkshire. These were then transported and assembled on site to form the skeleton for the 33m long and 12m wide pavilion. The whole building was then clad internally and externally with over 1200 sheets of 18mm ply, before being wrapped with a hessian scrim and coated with a thin wash of black Idenden and water, a subtle finish providing a serene backdrop for the intimate interior landscape.



Groundworks: We provided curved paths and festoon lighting



From busy site to tranquil retreat - a five-week transformation

A total of six doors in the austere-looking, box-like exterior led to a single, continuous corridor around the inside of the building where four internal doors opened into the hidden courtyard. Here, we installed a Prussian blue stained bench around the entire inner perimeter.

Outside, we undertook the ground works, providing curved concrete paths leading to the external doorways and also providing festoon lighting strung between galvanised poles to the front and rear of the pavilion.

A core crew of ten were on site for a period of five weeks, working around and alongside the team undertaking the planting of Piet Oudolf's garden. With a busy schedule and well versed in the restrictions of The Royal Parks Agency, our experienced crew applied their usual systematic organisational skills to receiving the multiple deliveries of large quantities of material to a site with minimal storage, restricted access, and lying within a much-used public park.

The pavilion was located on the Serpentine Gallery lawn in Kensington Gardens from July to October of 2011.



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I was not prepared to meet a bunch of highly motivated and skilled people giving their best in the city of London. Thank you to the guys from the North. Such a pleasure to meet you.”



Peter Zumthor