

Pittsburgh Botanic Garden Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



The hilly terrain of the Appalachian Plateau is already wild and wooded. How do you accent that wildness and create experiences distinct from an ordinary walk in the woods?

The Acorn Group developed the interpretive master plan for the Pittsburgh Botanic Garden, located on 460 acres of abandoned coal mining land west of downtown Pittsburgh. Set amidst hills and bottomlands, the Garden's woodlands, streams, and hollows provide the backdrop for myriad botanical displays from fern glades to fairy woods. When completed, the Garden will be one of the largest botanical gardens in the United States and the only one built on reclaimed land.

We conducted a comprehensive site visit and facilitated a planning charrette to establish interpretive messages and goals. We interviewed staff and board members to glean further insight into

the composition and behavior of typical visitors, desired "take home" experiences, target flagship collections, and factors that distinguish the Garden from neighboring institutions.

The theme-based message hierarchy we created guided the next phase of work—developing the recommendations for print media, interactives, displays and exhibits, and programs.

Our interpretive master plan proposes a new wayfinding system, fun and visually bold plant identification sign system supported by Near-field Communication (NFC) tags, hands-on interpretive panels, and architectural gateways that announce arrival at the Garden's Woodlands of the World.



The media we've proposed accommodates the fitness walker who seeks trail information, the garden admirer who is curious about a specimen, the out of town visitor who wants to linger, and the family who wants to recreate, while taking advantage of interpretive opportunities.