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"We wanted to go  
beyond just talking  
about creativity,  
to create a completely  
immersive experience."

— JEAN-FRANCOIS BOUCHARD,  
CURATOR OF C2-MTL

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# Planning the Coolest Conference

How C2-MTL brought masterminds of  
commerce and creativity together P.35



Green scene: Nashville's Music City Center will feature a 175,000-square-foot green roof that mimics the rolling hills of Tennessee.



# CUTTING-EDGE CONVENTION CENTERS

~ Flexible spaces, green design and free Wi-Fi are top trends ~

BY MICHAEL C. LOWE

Once primarily built to showcase their sprawling exhibit halls, today's convention centers are flexible, multipurpose complexes with plenty of breakout rooms and comfortable networking areas. They're environmentally friendly, with robust Internet connectivity and creative design elements. Here we profile eight noteworthy facilities, all in progress, newly opened or revamped.

## MUSIC CITY CENTER

Nashville

**OPENING:** May 2013

The new Music City Center will take ecology-minded facilities to a new level thanks to a 175,000-square-foot

green roof covered in sedum, a short flowering plant, and designed to mimic the rolling hills of Tennessee. Rainwater that seeps through the rooftop garden will be collected in 360,000-gallon-capacity tanks, which eventually will be used to flush toilets and for landscaping purposes. The garden is just one of many sustainable practices that will help the 1.2 million-square-foot center become LEED Silver-certified when it opens next spring.

The roof won't be the only thing piquing planners' interest. The venue's 350,000 square feet of exhibit space will employ a cutting-edge design that allows columns to be fewer and farther apart, giving organizers more flexibility and exhibitors more visibility. Where other convention centers might offer exhibit halls with





**River view:** An ambitious renovation of the Cobo Convention Center will feature a new glass atrium alongside the Detroit River.

columns in 90- by 90-foot grids, three sections of Music City Center's exhibit hall will feature columns along a 240- by 360-foot grid, says Seab Tuck, principal with Tuck-Hinton Architects and an architect on the project. "Visitors will be able to walk into these halls and see everything," he notes.

Other spaces within the center will include a 57,000-square-foot ballroom, an 18,000-square-foot junior ballroom and 60 meeting rooms. In all, the venue will more than double the current available meeting and exhibit space in downtown Nashville.

Just under a year from opening day, business at Music City Center already is off to a promising start with 617,151 total room nights and 71 contracts already on the books as of press time.

### **COBO CONVENTION CENTER**

Detroit

**RENOVATION DEBUTS:** 2015

The Motor City's 2.4 million-square-foot Cobo Convention Center will complete a \$299 million renovation just in time to host ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership's annual meeting and exposition in 2015, which will be the first time the annual event comes to town.

The conference will be a good chance for officials to show off the convention center's new additions, including a three-story glass atrium linking to a new entrance that faces the Detroit River, as well as a new 40,000-square-foot ballroom that will feature floor-to-ceiling windows facing the river and open-air prefunction areas with views of downtown Detroit.

"When you came here before, you couldn't see the city anymore. There was no feel or flavor of Detroit," notes Tom Connors, general manager of the complex. "By integrating the city into the design, we're making Cobo more a part of the urban fabric."

Indeed, the center, which received its last upgrade in 1989, is part of a local renaissance, says Connors. "There are a lot of different things happening right now in Detroit: new business, new residents, urban farming, entrepreneurial activity. The transformation of Cobo is a reflection of the transformation going on downtown."

The renovation is adding a total of 150,000 square feet of function space, including 25,000 square feet for meetings and 22,500 square feet for exhibitions, and is expected to be LEED-certified. The center offers free Wi-Fi throughout.

### **JEKYLL ISLAND (GA.) CONVENTION CENTER**

**OPENED:** May 2012

For planners interested in exposing their attendees to nature, the new ocean-front Jekyll Island Convention Center just offshore in Southeast Georgia is ideal. Known for its beautiful beaches and varied wildlife, Jekyll Island is a state park that allows development on only 35 percent of its acreage, allowing convention-goers to take advantage of unspoiled terrain.

The \$40 million, 128,000-square-foot center features beach access and expansive views of sea turtle nesting areas, along with fire pits so attendees can enjoy the island at night without violating area light ordinances.

"We are surrounded by such a natural landscape that we wanted to build something that was sensitive to the environment," notes Anna Hall, communications specialist for the Jekyll Island Authority. To that end, the center uses solar panels to generate much of its energy and an 80,000-gallon cistern to store rainwater for landscaping, among a slate of other green features geared to garner LEED Silver certification.

For events, the center's 45,000-square-



foot ballroom can be divided into smaller spaces, and there are 11 dedicated meeting rooms totaling approximately 7,800 square feet of space. Free Wi-Fi is available throughout, and plenty of electrical outlets are scattered around so attendees can stay charged up.

#### CLEVELAND MEDICAL MART AND CONVENTION CENTER

**OPENING:** Summer 2013

When the building is up and running, facility operators at the Cleveland Medical Mart and Convention Center will

be able to adjust things like heating and cooling, window shades and even individual light fixtures via iPads, giving planners instantaneous flexibility and customization. "This means we can be right in front of the organizer or exhibitor and dim the lights exactly how they want them," says Brian Milner, director of operations for the center.

Being able to control such settings on the fly will come in handy at the mammoth (more than one million square feet) two-level venue when it opens next summer. The Medical Mart, which will sit above street level, will be a 235,000-square-foot space with permanent showrooms where health-care organizations can display and demonstrate their products and devices. Below that will be the convention center, which will offer some 230,000 square feet of meeting space, including 90,000 square feet of flexible meeting rooms and a 30,000-square-foot ballroom with 30-foot-high floor-to-ceiling windows and views of Lake Erie. The complex is expected to receive LEED Silver certification and hopes to achieve zero waste shortly after opening.

Whether above or below ground, attendees won't have to worry about wireless connectivity. The entire building will be covered, and service will be fast. "If you get Road Runner speed at home, this will be a whole flock of Road Runners," says Milner.

#### LONG BEACH (CALIF.) CONVENTION CENTER

**RENOVATED:** February 2012

Hip enough to attract the forward-thinking TED conference every year, the Long Beach Convention Center has further upped the ante in trendiness, thanks to a new \$20 million redesign.

Just as TED celebrates the sharing of ideas, the center's new layout has resulted in the creation of myriad mini-meeting spots or "pods," which are equipped with various combinations of sleek, contemporary couches, armchairs, coffee tables and high tables with bar

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Pod city: The Long Beach Convention Center has casual networking areas for attendees.

stools, all strategically placed to form intimate, café-style lounges designed to allow spontaneous networking sessions throughout the venue.

"We wanted to create an environment for people to meet, collaborate and connect, and these spaces allow them to go anywhere around the center, find a place to sit down and talk with a colleague," says Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the facility. He acknowledges that the pods also reflect the impact of "younger attendees who are used to the Starbucks concept" of hanging out, working and socializing all at the same time.

In addition to new seating areas, the center has replaced all 3,000 seats in its Terrace Theatre; upgraded its lobbies, meeting rooms and hallway areas; and installed free Wi-Fi.

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### Redefining ROI for Meetings

July 18, 2012 • 2:00pm ET



**Moderator:** M&C Senior Editor Michael Shapiro

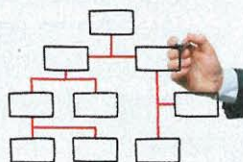
An exploration of latest methods for measuring the value of events.

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### SMMP for Advanced Meeting Professionals

August 15, 2012 • 2:00pm ET



**Moderator:** M&C Senior Editor Michael Shapiro

How to take strategic meetings management to the next level in your organization.

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### Greener Meetings on a Budget

September 19, 2012 • 2:00pm ET



**Moderator:** M&C Senior Editor Sarah J. F. Braley

Easy ways to plan eco-friendly events without increasing costs.

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## MOSCONE CENTER

San Francisco

**RENOVATED:** May 2012

Designers at the Moscone Center brought the big-city atmosphere of its location indoors, allowing convention-goers to experience the City by the Bay even during sessions.

Following a \$56 million, two-year renovation, public spaces and meeting rooms inside the convention center complex now feature a new San Francisco-centric design, including images of iconic city landmarks and colors, such as the Golden Gate Bridge's "international orange."

"A building can be just a building, but we wanted the Moscone Center to deliver attendees a sense of place and have



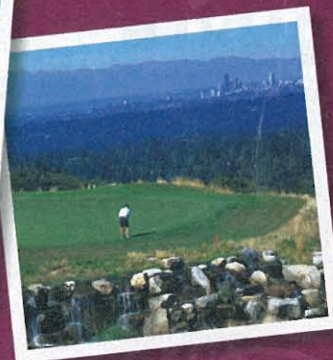
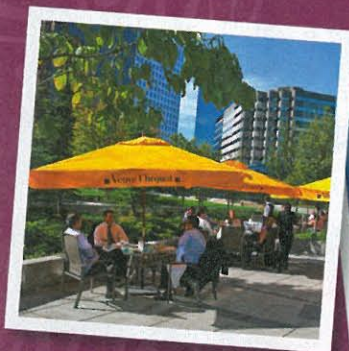
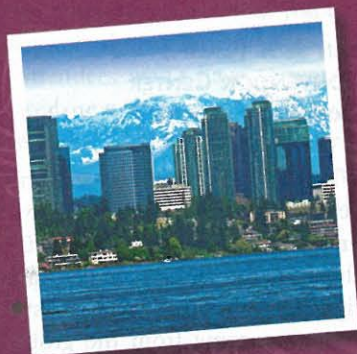
**Hooked up:** Moscone Center is now rigged with a new \$4.5 million Wi-Fi system.

some personality," says Joe D'Alessandro, CEO of San Francisco Travel, the city's official visitor organization. "At one point convention centers just had blank walls and it didn't really matter where you were, but it's important for a meet-

ing to talk about the destination and its surroundings."

As attendees move throughout the center's buildings, they pass a stream of images that change to reflect different Bay Area environments. In the South

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Custom fit: An expansion at the San Jose Convention Center promises flexible spaces.

building, which faces the Silicon Valley, visitors will be reminded of the tech industry with metallic ceiling finishes and LED screens, while in the North building, visions of redwoods and wine country abound. Appropriately, in the space that connects the two buildings, attendees will find themselves walking alongside dramatic images of the Golden Gate Bridge.

Though such imagery might be the most noticeable upgrade, every surface in the facility has been refurbished, from new elevators, airwalls and wood ceilings in the lobby to the back of the house, according to D'Alessandro.

One major new amenity is the addition of a \$4.5 million wireless Internet system that can provide high-speed service to as many as 60,000 devices at one time. "We really needed to increase the capabilities of the center, considering how close we are to the Silicon Valley," says D'Alessandro. "So we wanted to make it the best in the country."

The center is aiming to achieve LEED Gold certification.

**SAN JOSE (CALIF.)  
CONVENTION CENTER  
EXPANSION DEBUTS: Fall 2013**

When the San Jose Convention Center began work on a \$120 million expansion project, officials enlisted a 30-person client advisory board to help guide design decisions. One of the most notable results to come from the group was a unanimous vote for a ballroom that could be divided into eight sections, instead of four, opting for more flexibility even though it was against the recommendations of some of the other agencies involved in the project.

"Planners want flexibility with meeting spaces that can be used for breakouts, larger sessions or multipurpose," says Peter Green, vice president of Conference Direct and a member of the client advisory board. "San Jose's expansion and renovation project addresses these trends and provides the utmost flexibility, which is critical for today's meetings."

**PENNSYLVANIA CONVENTION CENTER EXPANSION**

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— GRETCHEN BLISS, DIRECTOR OF CONFERENCES AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES, EDUCAUSE

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**Sight selection:** Stunning views are de rigueur at the new Utah Valley Convention Center.

In all, the center is adding some 125,000 square feet of space by fall 2013, including the above-mentioned breakout rooms that will span a total of 25,000 square feet, 35,000 square feet of ballroom space, 51,000 square feet of prefunction space and more. The project will increase the venue's total usable capacity to 550,000 square feet.

Catering to its nearby Silicon Valley clients, the center also will offer free high-speed wireless Internet that will be able to support thousands of devices at a time. Attendees won't have to worry about speed, says Bill Sherry, CEO of Team San Jose. "Early on, we concluded that free Wi-Fi was an amenity that we wanted to give our clients, and we wanted it to be free, fast and everywhere."

#### UTAH VALLEY CONVENTION CENTER

Provo, Utah

**OPENED:** May 2012

The Utah Valley Convention Center makes the most of its majestic surroundings. Floor-to-ceiling windows are abundant at the facility, offering dramatic panoramas of the Wasatch Mountain Range as attendees walk through prefunction areas on their way to appointments. Several of the meeting rooms also have glass walls with inspiring views, though for fresh mountain air, the 5,500-square-foot rooftop terrace is the place.

The venue's outdoor space provides

views of Mount Timpanogos, the second highest peak in Utah, and is hooked up with gas, so organizers interested in holding a rooftop barbecue or bringing

out heat lamps during colder temperatures won't have a problem.

Throughout the design process, functionality was a priority, says Tenille Wanner, director of sales and marketing for the center, giving the impetus to features like the 19,620-square-foot exhibit hall that can be divided in half or into thirds, depending on need. The increased interest in flexible space, says Wanner, is a reflection of planners continuing to be cautious of how they spend their money and wanting to make sure they're getting the best value for the buck.

The convention center, which is shared by Brigham Young University, also offers a 16,894-square-foot ballroom and 10,226 square feet of breakout space, and expects to receive LEED silver certification. **MC**



PENNSYLVANIA CONVENTION CENTER EXPANSION

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"The entire Philly team focuses on helping customers like us find solutions and, together, we were able to create a fabulous event. We're very much looking forward to 2015, when we'll bring our annual conference and exposition back to Philadelphia."

THAT'S MY PHILADELPHIA STORY

—DONELLA EVONIUK, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF CONFERENCE SERVICES,  
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