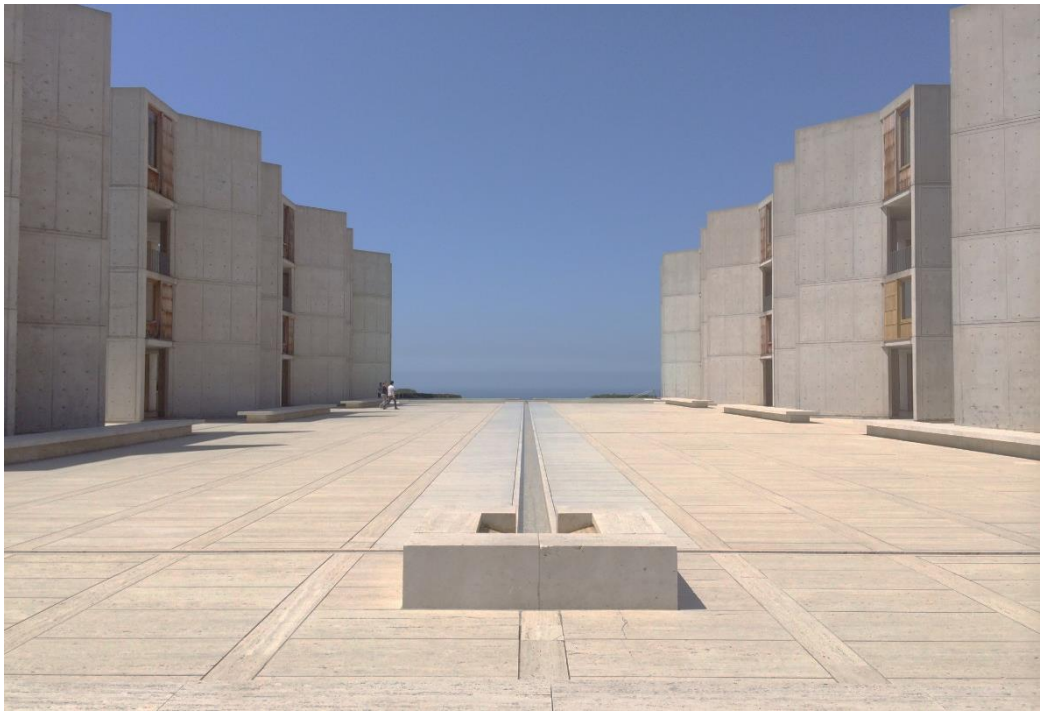
PROJECT PROFILE

Salk Institute for Biological Studies

Teak Wood Window Conservation Program | La Jolla, CA



CLIENT

Rudolph & Sletten Inc.
Construction Manager, for the Salk Institute for Biological Studies

BACKGROUND

The Salk Institute for Biological Studies was founded by Jonas Salk, the developer of the polio vaccine. Salk had sought to create a beautiful campus in order to draw the best researchers in the world and called upon the architect Louis I. Kahn to implement his vision.

Kahn's distinctive concrete structure situated on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean is recognized throughout the world as a seminal work of modernist architecture. Natural light, views, and sea air enter the cast-in-place concrete structures of the laboratories and study towers through teak wood window walls.

Construction on the Salk Institute was completed in 1965, and after fifty years in an exposed marine environment, the teak window assemblies had weathered and deteriorated significantly. Rather than continue to implement ongoing minor repairs, the Salk Institute decided to embark upon a conservation-based approach that would address the window issues on a long-term basis. WJE was retained to develop a window inventory, repairs, and construction documents for the long-term care of the teak wood windows.

SOLUTION

In the first stage of the project, WJE was engaged by the Salk Institute for Biological studies to consult on a preliminary study to evaluate the structural capacity and long-term performance of the existing window fenestration system. WJE was then engaged to carry out a condition survey, inventory, and assessment of all of the windows, documenting the various conditions, including deterioration and long-term exposure to ultraviolet light within a marine environment.

WJE is currently developing a preservation program based on different types of repairs in order to retain as much of the original Burmese teak wood material as possible. The program addressed various levels of distress and deterioration exhibited by the teak wood window wall units. Working with the Salk Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, the construction manager, and the contractor, the team reviewed and refined the repair protocols, balancing historic preservation needs, conservation treatments, and long-term care and maintenance of the original teak wood windows.

The wood window conservation program will inform the development of the overall Conservation Management Plan (CMP) that WJE is preparing for the Salk Institute for Biological Studies. The CMP will address and provide a policy for the long term care and conservation of the complex.

WJE | ENGINEERS ARCHITECTS MATERIALS SCIENTISTS