


KING CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP ACADEMY


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JAMES & ELIZABETH BRAMSEN
Tropical Forests
GORILLA CONSERVATION CENTER
THE GROVE




OZINGA
FAMILY
WINDOW




KELLER
FAMILY
CONSERVATION
TRAIL








SUSAN & PATRICK FRANGELLA WINDOW


3 Ways a Silverback
GETS HIS TROOP
smarte
carte

James & Elizabeth Bramsen Tropical Forests

Brookfield, Illinois, USA

Bramsen Tropical Forests at Brookfield Zoo Chicago represents a significant evolution in primate habitat design, uniting animal welfare, immersive visitor experience and custom architecture within a three-acre campus expansion. Designed by GP in collaboration with zoo staff and exhibit design consultant Stantec, the project reimagines how primates are housed, cared for and encountered in a modern zoo setting.

The new habitat provides guests with an immersive experience across four lush rainforest environments inspired by Africa, Asia and South America with five viewing shelters to encounter western lowland gorillas, Bornean orangutans, white-cheeked gibbons and South American monkeys. Located alongside Tropic World, one of the largest indoor habitats in the world when it opened in 1984, the project expands and reinvents the existing Tropic World footprint, creating four dynamic outdoor habitats with mesh, aviary-style enclosures along the north side of the building. The Gorilla Conservation Center is a new addition to the west, providing dedicated space for conservation and education, as well as behind-the-scenes habitats and an additional habitat indoors for guests to learn about gorillas.

Designing a rainforest habitat in Chicago required a careful balance of immersive naturalism and technical resilience. Outdoor enclosures incorporate terrain variation, water features, selected existing trees, and climate-adaptive plantings, supported by mesh and cable systems engineered for snow and ice loads. Heated rockwork and concealed environmental systems offer welfare-focused accommodations during outdoor activity, while indoor spaces provide flexible, acoustically protected environments for animal care. Throughout the project, durable materials such as concrete and steel are composed with a refined, gallery-like sensibility that reinforces dignity over spectacle.

Visitor experience is intentionally immersive yet restrained. Viewing shelters and framed sightlines prioritize animal comfort by avoiding constant exposure, allowing primates to retreat while still enabling meaningful encounters. Adjacent educational and event spaces extend the project's conservation mission beyond the habitats themselves.

Bramsen Tropical Forests is the largest and most ambitious project in the zoo's history. The project also marks the first phase of the Next Century Plan, a long-term vision for the zoo's continuing evolution.

Project Data

SIZE

142,900 sf total

25,900 sf interior habitat
117,000 sf exterior habitat

FEATURES

New building addition
4 outdoor habitats

Exhibit Designer: Stantec

CLIENT

Brookfield Zoo Chicago

Recognition & News

RECOGNITION

2026 People's Choice Award, Cultural & Museum – American Institute of Architects, Chicago Chapter

2026 Finalist, Merit Award for Commercial Construction – Chicago Building Congress

NEWS

GP Completes Transformative Primate Habitat at Brookfield Zoo Chicago