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The New York Botanical Garden Selects Diller Scofidio + Renfro as Lead Architect for an Innovative On-site Biofiltration System and a New Café

NYBG's Living Biofiltration System Will Be the First of Its Kind in New York City, Purifying Wastewater to Help Recharge the City's Water Supply System

Bronx, NY, August 5, 2026—The New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) has selected the renowned studio of Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS+R) as the lead architect for an innovative living biofiltration system, as well as a new café, both of which will be sited in a brand-new complex to be located in the southeastern section of the Garden's 250-acre National Historic Landmark landscape. This exciting destination will be surrounded by a wetland and situated by a portion of the Bronx River within NYBG, and near several of its living plant collections, including the 50-acre native Thain Family Forest and award-winning Rockefeller Rose Garden.

"We could not be more excited to collaborate with the outstanding Diller Scofidio + Renfro on NYBG's transformational biofiltration system, as well as on our new café," said Jennifer Bernstein, Chief Executive Officer and The William C. Steere Sr. President of the New York Botanical Garden. "This unique system, which we believe will be the first of its kind in New York City, will showcase the power of plants and nature-based solutions for advancing water conservation—serving as a model for what New York City can do with creative approaches like these. This addition to the Garden will also be visually appealing and educational for visitors, serving as a living laboratory illustrating the cycle of water." Bernstein added, "We also look forward to working with DS+R on the creation of our new café, which will be the first public dining facility in the southeastern area of the Garden grounds and provide visitor amenities where they are currently limited."

Designed by DS+R in collaboration with Natural Systems Utilities (NSU), the new system will treat on-site wastewater from the historic Stone Mill, an administrative workspace and venue for private events, and the Garden's Horticulture Operations Center, using biofiltration—a process by which living plants and microorganisms break down and remove pollutants from the water. The treated water will then feed into an underground water table that contributes to New York City's larger water system. SCAPE Landscape Architecture will lead the integration of the project within the Garden's surrounding ecosystem.

The biofiltration system will be part of a dedicated educational space for visitors, transforming an existing parking lot and septic drain fields into a wetland-meadow ecosystem. Set alongside New York City’s only freshwater river, visitors will be able to explore this reimagined wastewater treatment system—which will be odorless, energy efficient, and chemical free—as an example of nature-based urban resource conservation.

NYBG’s new café will be the first dining option in the southeastern section of the Garden, bringing much-needed visitor amenities and restrooms to this area.

“We are honored to work with the New York Botanical Garden on what will be a Bronx-forward ecological prototype,” said Ben Gilmartin, Partner at DS+R. Studio Principal and Director of Sustainable Design Sean Gallagher added, “NYBG’s longstanding commitment to connecting people, plants, and our shared planet makes it a natural partner for demonstrating how living systems like this one can reimagine waste as a resource, revealing new ways people and nature can work together to sustain urban life.”

DS+R brings significant experience on high-profile New York City and international projects grounded in eco-centric design across scales. DS+R is perhaps best known for transforming a post-industrial rail line into the High Line, an elevated urban park that invites millions each year. In 2025, the studio received the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale for Canal Café, a hybrid laboratory-café that used biofiltration to purify water from the Venice Lagoon to make delicious espresso. DS+R’s collaboration with NYBG builds on the studio’s more than two decades of ongoing research into how ecological systems can enrich the health, resilience, and social fabric of cities—a mission the Garden shares.

Through their collaboration, DS+R, NSU, SCAPE, and NYBG will expand on the Garden’s 135 years of impact in botanical science and conservation, showcasing the hidden systems that shape our daily lives, and in turn, growing public understanding of the fundamental connection between plants, people, and the planet. The new living biofiltration system will offer a forward-thinking model for how New York City and its institutions can sustainably replace aging wastewater treatment infrastructure with innovative and powerful nature-based solutions.

About The New York Botanical Garden

The New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) has been a connective hub among people, plants, and the shared planet since 1891. For more than 130 years, NYBG has been rooted in the cultural fabric of New York City, in the heart of the Bronx, its greenest borough. NYBG has invited millions of visitors to make the Garden a part of their lives, exploring the joy, beauty, and respite of nature. NYBG’s 250 acres are home to renowned exhibitions, immersive botanical experiences, art and music, and events with some of the most influential figures in plant and fungal science, horticulture, and the humanities. NYBG is

also a steward of globally significant research collections, from the LuEsther T. Mertz Library collection to the plant and fungal specimens in the William and Lynda Steere Herbarium, the largest such collection in the Western Hemisphere.

The plant people of NYBG—dedicated horticulturists, enthusiastic educators, and scientific adventurers—are committed to helping nature thrive so that humanity can thrive. They believe in their ability to make things better, teaching tens of thousands of kids and families each year about the importance of safeguarding the environment and healthy eating. Expert scientists work across the city, the nation, and the globe to document the plants and fungi of the world—and find actionable, nature-based solutions to the planet’s dual climate and biodiversity crises. With eyes always looking forward, they train the next generation of botanists, gardeners, landscape designers, and environmental stewards, ensuring a green future for all. At NYBG, it’s nature—or nowhere.

About Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS+R)

DS+R is an interdisciplinary design studio founded in 1981 by Elizabeth Diller and the late Ricardo Scofidio, the first architects to receive the MacArthur Foundation "Genius Grant." The studio is currently led by three partners—Diller, Charles Renfro, and Benjamin Gilmartin. DS+R tackles complex architectural work at all scales, with an emphasis on ambitious cultural, civic, and educational projects. The studio has completed a number of significant urban-scale and institutional projects in New York City, including the redesign of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the adaptive reuse of the High Line, The Shed, and the renovation and expansion of MoMA.

DS+R’s approach to rethinking cultural institutions and civic spaces blur the boundaries between architecture and art and between nature and culture. In 2021, DS+R collaborated with artist and food activist Linda Goode Bryant on *Are we really that different?* an installation that converted the highly controlled environment of the Gagosian art gallery into a site of agricultural production, with produce harvested weekly and donated to city residents. The studio’s recently completed works include Al-Mujadilah Mosque and Center in Doha, the first purpose-built contemporary mosque for women in the Muslim world, and V&A East Storehouse in London, an adaptive reuse project that marks a paradigm shift in museum access. DS+R’s upcoming slate of projects includes Nuevo Azca, an urban forest ecosystem transforming Madrid’s financial center and the adaptive reuse of the Metropolitan Storage Warehouse in Cambridge, a historic storage facility reimaged for MIT’s School of Architecture and Planning.

About Natural Systems Utilities (NSU)

NSU is a national leader in distributed water reclamation and reuse innovation, currently operating over 450 systems across the United States, including the largest base of onsite reuse and natural treatment systems. NSU’s approach offers clients fully integrated and cost-effective solutions that incorporate award-winning innovations in system design. With over 40 years of experience NSU has the unique capability to structure a full range of design, build, operations and ownership project solutions. Their reputation has been built on best-in-class execution capability, and on long-term shared-value partnerships with the people and communities served.

About SCAPE Landscape Architecture

SCAPE is a collaborative landscape architecture and urban design practice that shapes beloved places that are socially vibrant and ecologically restorative. Every scale is essential. From 100-mile river corridors to rooftop microplazas, our work combines design excellence and a deep knowledge of ecology to regenerate, connect, and transform the built environment.

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The New York Botanical Garden is located at 2900 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, New York 10458. For more information, visit nybg.org.

The New York Botanical Garden is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. A portion of the Garden's general operating funds is provided by The New York City Council and The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. The Bronx Borough President and Bronx elected representatives in the City Council and State Legislature provide leadership funding.

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