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Visitors enter a third-floor gallery during the Jan. 11 grand opening for the new Dalí Museum in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Florida's Newest Dalí Museum

By BETH GREENFIELD

WHEN a Cleveland-based art-collecting couple put word out that they needed a home for their extensive Salvador Dalí holdings back in the 1970s, St. Petersburg, Fla., heeded the call. The city made an impressive offer — to build a museum for Eleanor and A. Reynolds Morse's trove of works by the Surrealist master. That museum opened in 1982 and has played a large part in making the city a destination for culture vultures from around the world.

Earlier this month, a new, larger Dalí Museum on Tampa Bay opened with plenty of fanfare, replacing the old one, and hopes to further expand that cultural reach.

The museum director, Hank Hine, was aware that the collection needed to be better protected from the elements. "Our motivation was to get it secured — hurricane-proof, flood-proof," he said. "Then we saw the chance to make it more amenable to visitor experience." While the previous museum received an average of 200,000 visitors annually, "This building has the capacity to wel-

come three times as many," he said.

The new museum, which cost \$36 million and took two years to complete, has more than doubled the exhibition space of its predecessor. All 96 oil paintings can now be displayed simultaneously, with room to spare for much of the rest of the collection, which includes 100 watercolors and drawings and 1,300 graphics, sculptures and other objets d'art. Works represent every period of Dalí's career, with painting highlights including "The Average Bureaucrat" (1930), "The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory" (1952-54) and "Portrait of My Dead Brother" (1963).

The new space, said the organizers, allows for better presentation. "The works have more air and space around them, and better lighting," said the project architect, Yann Weymouth of the HOK firm in Tampa. "They have a life to them."

Mr. Weymouth's striking building is a concrete trapezoid wrapped in an undulating wave of glass and steel. Its solid structure — with 18-inch-thick walls — can withstand a Category 5 hurricane. And its design is an homage to the Dalí Teatro-Museo in Figueres, Spain, which is topped by a Buckminster Fuller geo-

desic domes.

"Here, we warped it, and were able to let it flow around corners and things that are far more irregular," Mr. Weymouth said of the curving dome, which he's called the "Glass Enigma." It is composed of 1,062 glass triangles, he said, no two of which are identical. Another architectural feat is a soaring spiral staircase of solid concrete that's a nod to Dalí's fascination with the double-helical structure of DNA.

More than 2,000 visitors flooded into the new museum on opening day, Jan. 11, after a ribbon-cutting ceremony that featured Spanish royalty and a "surreal procession" from the old museum to the new, complete with a Dalí look-alike riding in a horse-drawn carriage.

"I loved the old museum, but this is so exciting," said a local resident, Rachel Calderone, perched on a museum-garden bench topped with a sculptural version of one of the famous melting clocks from "The Persistence of Memory." "We are so, so lucky to have it. It really has revived St. Pete."

The Dalí Museum, 1 Dalí Boulevard, St. Petersburg, Fla.; (727) 823-3767; salvadordalimuseum.org; admission is \$21; \$10 on Thursdays after 5 p.m. ■