Recently, you might have noticed some new signs around the Museum, featuring our famous Sphinx in a new role: on a hard hat. These signal that “big changes are underway”—and they truly are. On November 1, 2017, we celebrated the start of our extensive building renovations with a kickoff event in the Harrison Auditorium. Joined by Penn’s President Dr. Amy Gutmann, Chairman of the Board of Trustees David Cohen, Partner Richard Gluckman of Gluckman Tang Architects, members of our own Board of Overseers, and Penn Museum volunteers, lead supporters, and staff, we removed chairs from the historic Auditorium in our version of a groundbreaking.

The current construction will restore the Harrison Auditorium, after over a century of use, to a comfortable space with advanced programming capacities. It will also transform the way visitors first encounter the Museum and how they move through it. As soon as visitors step through the Kamin Main Entrance doors, they will be in a space filled with light. By removing the walls separating the Main Entrance Hall from the grand 1899 marble staircases on either side of it, we will re-open beautiful arched windows and—by restoring the staircases that have been closed off for decades—create easy access to the Harrison Auditorium.

Reopening the 1899 staircases allows the removal of the 1915 Harrison Wing stairs, and thus, the creation of a new gallery space behind the welcome desk where visitors will see objects as soon as they enter the larger, brighter Main Entrance Hall. The Museum Shop will open in January in a new location adjacent to the Pepper Mill Café and the Africa Galleries.

This is the Museum’s moment. Today, we embark on a dramatic reconfiguration of this building. We begin work leading to the reinstallation of signature galleries that will illuminate the Museum’s unmatched store of knowledge and wonder. ... The Penn Museum is all about the discovery and preservation of knowledge; it fosters interdisciplinary innovation; and it offers service to the community and the world. It is not just a place to display treasure—it is the treasure.

—Amy Gutmann, speaking at the November 1 construction kickoff event
From this new gallery space, visitors will have—for the first time—options for vertical circulation throughout the Museum. On the west side, a new passenger elevator will link all levels of the Harrison Wing, providing access to the Auditorium or the third-floor galleries. And on the east side, a new Gateway to Egypt will beckon visitors to explore the Museum’s magnificent Egyptian collection. By replacing the walls with glass and broadening the passageway, we will create a light-filled corridor to the Coxe (Egyptian) Wing, where visitors can access the upper and lower galleries via a new passenger elevator or staircases.

With two new passenger elevators, greatly enhanced visitor access and amenities in the Harrison Auditorium and its lobby, a new gallery space on the second floor, and a newly light-filled gateway between the Harrison and Coxe Wings, the visitor experience will, by Fall 2019, truly be transformed through, as the Sphinx signals, “big changes.”

**GALLERY UPDATES:**

- The Islamic Near East Gallery is closed so that some of the objects can move to our new Middle East Galleries, opening on April 21. Before these stunning new galleries open, you can see many of their objects being conserved in *The Artifact Lab: Conservation in Action.*

- Some objects in the Egyptian Galleries have been removed for conservation or to keep them safe, and *Amarna: Ancient Egypt’s Place in the Sun* is closed, as we begin construction including the installation of a new elevator and stairwell and new restrooms in the Coxe (Egyptian) Wing. However, you can watch conservators restoring the ancient limestone tomb chapel of Kaipure, an important pharaonic treasury official in the Egypt (Sphinx) Gallery.

- The *Human Evolution* gallery is closed, as we prepare to open a new and improved Museum Shop in its space this month.